



# MARK GRAY'S HERITAGE

*By*  
ELIOT H.  
ROBINSON



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## BY ELIOT H. ROBINSON

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BY

ELIOT H. ROBINSON

Author of " 'Smiles': A Rose of the Cumberlands,"

"Smiling Pass: Being a Further Account of  
the Career of 'Smiles,'" "The Maid of  
Mirabelle," "Man Proposes," etc.

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*"What is bred in the bone will never  
come out of the flesh"*



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I DEDICATE THIS ROMANCE TO  
MY FATHER  
WHO HAS ALWAYS HAD MY  
FILIAL RESPECT IN FULL MEASURE,  
AND WHO—GROWING EVER YOUNGER IN  
SPIRIT, AS I HAVE GROWN OLDER IN  
YEARS—HAS BECOME MY BELOVED  
COMPANION.





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# Mark Gray's Heritage

## CHAPTER I

### DWELLERS IN CONTENT: AND TWO INTERLOPERS

"SPEED er' up, Bill! Have you gone to sleep, or got an idea in your head that we're takin' part in a funeral procession?"

The driver of the big car started from his reverie, and laughed apologetically. "Guess I was sorter dreamin'—generally do at night, yuh know, and it's so calm and peaceful-like. Ain't it now, Flash?"

"Huh! Dead; dead and dark as the devil, *I* calls it."

"Oh well, 'darkest jest a-fore dawn,' as the poet ses. See that little streak, ahead, kinder like a rubbed out chalk mark on a blackboard? That's a new day comin'. I always like tuh see a day bein' borned, somehow. It's like a new baby: yuh can't help wondering, sorter, what's goin' tuh kap-pen in its short life, can yuh?"

The other snorted. "Turn over, you're talkin' in

your sleep. Give 'er the gas, for the love of Mike."

There was a mighty sigh from the driver. But his hurt reiteration, "Well, it is kinder pretty, jest the same," was lost in the roar of the cut-out muffler, and the powerful machine leaped forward with a rush which sent the needle of the speedometer up to fifty miles an hour.

The speaker was right; lovely it was.

The hem of night's mantle—blue-black and shimmering with star jewels—still rested on the horizon hills save for that one spot in the East where it had been lifted a little, and the light of dawning day appeared. Everywhere else the soft darkness reigned, challenged only by the moving sheaf of light projected forward by the car's blazing headlights.

The two men relapsed into silence. They were merely vague forms, now, but day would show them to be as totally unlike as was possible, and both had already disclosed something of their contrasting natures. From the remarks of the one of massive bulk, who was now clutching the steering wheel with hands half again as large as those of ordinary mortals, it is safe to assume that, had he been able to know that a few miles further on, he was—in all innocence—soon to sow the seeds of trouble, he would incontinently have changed his homeward course.

But prescience was not in his power—nor his vocabulary. And Dame Fortune who directed his



doings, as all of ours, is a capricious jade who likes nothing better than to have her little joke at mankind's expense, making playthings of the most seemingly unromantic material and selecting the most unlikely spots as her stage. So, through the waning night, the big car swept on, over the summit and down the slope of hill after hill which descended like rough-hewn steps into a valley, now asleep and smiling. It was a valley dotted with peaceful farms in the midst of blossoming orchards and springtime gardens; and in the heart of it lay . . . Content.

Content—the wish had been father to the thought with those who named the little village—was also fast asleep, like a gentle gray dove nesting in a green hollow. Its dwellers were blissfully unconscious of the fact that the forerunner of mad adventure was even now bearing swiftly down upon it, and were perchance dreaming that their security was complete—that they were as safely shut off from the bustling, wicked world without as though their encircling hills had been impassable mountains. Such was, indeed, the normal condition there. “Stone walls do not a prison make” sang Lovelace; and, conversely, mankind can to a considerable degree succeed in enclosing itself within invisible walls, if it will. The dwellers in Content had so willed, for generations. For they were of the Society of Friends—at heart just such men and women as their Quaker forebears had been, nearly

two centuries before, when they had migrated over those very eastern hills to seek and find peace from persecution in that valley where milk and honey flowed.

In minor ways, of course, change had crept in: external change, exemplified by the time-blackened smithy, for instance. For the shop where Friend John Gray—a man of peace despite his herculean proportions—labored, with joy in his task, six days each week, now bore a sign announcing that automobiles might be repaired there. Above still swung the ancient board, from which wind and weather had all but erased the painted legend “Horse Shoeing.” And now a modern red sentinel, with its placard setting forth the fact that gasoline might there be purchased for thirty cents the gallon, stood close beside the hand-hewn trough within which the water still bubbled and streamed just as it had for fifty yester-years when the red-hot tires for Quaker buggies were plunged in it to be shrunk into place. Finally, just inside the open-faced shed itself, hung a sign enjoining strangers from smoking. No such prohibition was needed by the men and boys of Content!

Yet even this peaceful place, willing itself to be apart from the naughty world, could not keep ever inviolate the invisible walls which it had reared. A quarter of a century previous its tranquillity had been rudely ruptured for a time, when an earlier emissary of Dame Fortune had ridden into it over

those same hilltops—though *not* in a racing motor car, be it said. But that's another story.

Moreover, the seed of evil which is planted in the heart of every man occasionally sprang up within the village itself, and then the maturing weed had to be sternly plucked out, in accordance with the New Testament injunction, "If thy right hand offend thee cut it off and cast it from thee." Oh, they lived literally by The Book, these dwellers in Content.

And even at this moment, when trouble in tangible form was speeding towards the sleeping villages from the world without, John Gray, the gentle giant, was lying upon his hard bed, wide-awake. He was a prey to harpies of the mind, bred of worry. For it was whispered that evil's weed was growing up within his own household!

Perhaps it was true. Yet if a stranger could then have seen the cause of the report—John Gray's stalwart heir—as he lay asleep as peacefully as a baby in the bare adjoining bedroom, he would have found it hard to credit him with being a cause for actual consternation among his neighbors. As he lay there, his powerful young body scarcely covered by his plain nightshirt and a sheet, there would have seemed to an unprejudiced observer much to admire in him, and little to cause him to be written down a trouble-maker. Mark Gray's countenance was far too frank, wholesome, and honest-appearing for that! Still, had the visitor known human na-



ture and Quaker nature as well, he might perhaps have read the answer there, after all. For even in repose, and with his ever-smiling blue eyes closed, Mark's face held a hint of unbounding energy and vital force. His broad, pleasant mouth already had tiny laughter lines engraved at either corner; his firm chin displayed a noticeable cleft; and his thick chestnut hair, now tousled with slumber, had a rebellious wave which would never wholly disappear in spite of frequent and painstaking plasterings with a wet brush. It was a face which clearly betokened a frank and honorable nature, but likewise a mischievous spirit within; and mischief and quaker ethics mix like oil and water.

To be sure, few in Content called Mark Gray actually bad, since nearly every one liked him too well for his own sunny self; but many of the older generation, who had suffered from his boyhood pranks, followed the lead of the irascible Dyer Dexter and shook their heads whenever his name was mentioned. Nobody thinks of calling a stone bad, but every one knows that it can break a window and sadly ruffle the surface of the pool into which it falls, and Mark had already many times disturbed the habitual placidity of Content, and the ripples caused by his frequent falls had spread and spread. The disinterested onlooker would have called them merely ripples, at least, and been mildly amused by the commotion; but to four of the peaceful dwellers in that valley they were real waves, which had

already set their life-crafts to rocking, and which threatened to shipwreck one of them.

Of the four John Gray was one, needless to say. Upon his bowed, but powerful shoulders the lash of public opinion fell heavily every time that Mark, in his exuberance of youthful spirits, outraged the sensibilities of the small community. Yet another was Sister Patience, who, as housekeeper for the motherless Gray homestead, had for many years been daily called upon to play the rôle coincident with her name, where Mark was concerned. She loved him like a mother even when she cried, "Mark, Mark, if thou continuest to do so-and-so thou wilt shortly bring my white hair in sorrow to the grave!"

The third was a woman, likewise. But her hair, instead of being white like that of Sister Patience, was as smooth, brown, and sheenful as the wing of a thrush, and her young cheeks as smooth and delicately tinted as the petals of one of the spring roses now blooming in her garden. Nor had she any need of steel-bowed spectacles, like Patience's, to improve the vision of her eyes which could, and sometimes did, change from rich, deep brown to sparkling black.

"Sister Faith Franklyn hath sore need of a father—or a husband," Friend Dyer Dexter had once been heard to remark. He was a widower and his farm adjoined the smiling acres where the orphaned girl was struggling to support her little family. "I fear



that she is not sufficiently unmindful of the worldly fact that she hath the prettiest face and . . . and . . . the prettiest face in the village of Content."

Sister Faith might have no right to feel other than a strictly impersonal grief over the frequent lapses of Mark Gray. Her neighbors would certainly have said so, for, however much they may gossip upon certain topics, those who bear the name of Friends are not given to coupling the names of men and maidens with sly anticipatory smiles. But the youth had never raised his merry, blue eyes with that tell-tale, eager light in them to any other girl, and Faith knew it. Intuition in such matters is bred of the heart and as often exists beneath a plain white kerchief as under diamond necklaces.

The fourth was Mark, himself. Despite the now childlike peace of his slumber, there were moments when he bore the heaviest mental burden of them all. Why was he so accursed?

The spring dawn slowly brightened. The Eastward speeding automobile swept up a slope from the summit of which its occupants could now see, still far away before and below them, the peaceful valley and village of Content. Through it the smooth State highway passed, after winding down and down between fields pied with buttercups and clover and many neat little market gardens edged with fruit trees blooming pink and white. Its driver instinc-

tively slowed down a little and a pleased expression crossed his scarred and ugly face.

"Gee, Flash, that's kinder pretty, ain't it?" he remarked impulsively again.

His companion answered something which sounded like a grunt, and proceeded to light another cigarette, whose heavy Turkish incense intermingled with the malodorous smoke from the exhaust and trailed rearward, polluting the balmy spring air.

"It's sorter peaceful and . . . and Sunday school-like," went on the other, wistfully. "D'ye know, I get desperate tired of living in the city, sometimes, Flash? I was raised on a farm."

"Yea . . . you act it. Come on, 'Bull,' cut the sob-stuff and step on the gas. I wanter get back to said city sometime to-day, and hit the hay." He yawned and the driver sighed, mightily. He lacked the gift of expression, but there were moments when the music of poetry swelled within his heart and brought a little memory-ache with it. And now the sweetness and peace of the rural picture ahead took hold upon him. Without putting it into words, he felt the dovelike analogy suggested by that little distant village, composed of a cluster of simple and somber-tinted homes each like unto its neighbor, and he instinctively knew that its women would be likewise simple and sweet in their plain gray and white gowns, and its men close to nature and natural. To the man, bred on a farm and momentarily freed

again from the whirlpool of the city's milling life, it seemed as though he were slipping back into another and more pleasing existence.

Again he sighed, prodigiously, and stepped on the accelerator as bidden.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTENT IS AWAKENED

SIX days each week Content arose with the sun. But in many a home a gentle Quakeress donned gray gown and adjusted white kerchief across her breast with geometric precision long before day had fully dawned, so that the simple meal with which her men-folk were to break their fast might be ready for them when the first bright heralds of the coming morn streamed over the eastern hills to summon them from the refreshment of slumber to labor again.

Thus this morning Faith Franklyn, in her little home two miles distant from the village itself, had arisen by candle-light, already prepared breakfast for the one queer farm-hand, and was assisting her little motherless and fatherless family to dress.

She was still patiently brushing the tangled, golden locks of five-year-old Hope when, following a sudden roar which shattered the peace out-of-doors, the child broke away and ran to join her brother, three years her senior, before the open window.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the latter, "*that* one was going hell-bent-f'r-elecshun."



"Verily thou hatht thaid it," lisped the dainty bud from the same stock which had produced the blossom, Faith.

"Children! *David!* Where *dost* thou learn to speak language so unseemly and wicked? I know, of course. It is from Friend Jeremiah. Will the poor man never forget the manner of speech which he learned as a youth, when he was of the world, worldly? Sometimes I fear that it is hopeless to strive to change him." She sighed; then her sweet lips took on a sterner expression as she continued, "But thou shalt not be led astray by him, even if I have to punish thee, which heaven forbid," she added under her breath. "Thou art old enough to know better than say words like—nay, I shall not even repeat them. What doth the Apostle Matthew tell us about swearing? Answer me, David."

At her rebuke the boy hung his handsome little head and shifted from one bare foot to the other. Finally, in response to her insistent demand, he mumbled, "I say unto you, 'swear not at all: neither by the heaven; for it is God's throne; nor by the earth; for it is His footstool. But let your conversation . . .'"

"'Communication,' " corrected Faith.

"'Communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay, for whatever is more than these cometh of evil.' Why doth he say, '*you*,' instead of '*thou*,' Faith?"

"He was speaking to a multitude. Yea, thou hast forgotten some of it, but that is the gist. And



thou knowest that the first word which thou saidest was not . . . not nice. Well, it *was* not. It was closely akin to . . . to profanity . . . I think. Still thou art but a lad, and I forgive thee, this time, David." She bent and kissed him, tenderly, and would have changed the subject; but David—freed from the fear of further censure—was not ready to let it drop.

"Friend Mark sayeth words like that, sometimes. I heard him say . . . the one akin to profanity when I rode the old Prophet down to the smithy to be shod, yesterday."

His sister flushed slightly, but answered still more sternly, "If that is so he doeth very wrong, and I am sorry—almost as sorry as I was to hear thee utter it."

"Thou lovest Friend Mark dost thou not, sister?" the boy persisted.

Her rosy color deepened a shade as she replied, "I . . . I *like* him, surely."

"But The Book sayeth that we should love our neighbor as ourselves, and Mark *is* our neighbor, isn't he, sister Faith?"

"Of course." Her troubled thoughts were, for the moment, two miles away, and by answering truthfully she dug a pit for herself to fall in.

"Well then, if *I* must always do as The Book sayeth, why . . . ?"

"David, wilt thou stop asking questions, and finish thy dressing! See, thy sister Hope is ready,

and breakfast hath been waiting for nearly half an hour."

"Gosh, I'm hungry as . . . Oh, I said it again! I'm sorry, Faith, honest I am," repented the boy, and his sister sighed.

Meanwhile, others in Content had been rising betimes. Half an hour earlier the first ray of the rising sun had been reflected from the rosy cheek of the apple that Sister Patience was polishing with care, preparatory to placing it atop a dish of its kind upon the breakfast table. Refrigerators were still unknown in the village, but Mother Nature knows how to protect her fruit when it is buried in straw, deep within her bosom. The apple very nearly fell from Patience's hand, however, when a violent thud, overhead, shook the house and startled her from her customary composure—as she had been startled many a time before. A faint shadow like a cloud passed across her placid face, followed by a dart of sunshine in the guise of a tender little smile.

"Dear lad," she whispered; then added, speaking her thoughts aloud, "Mark, Mark, why *wilt* thou jump over the foot of thy bed, upon arising? It is surely not seemly actions in one now grown to manhood's estate, and at least it endangereth thy limbs."

But, in the room above, Mark was not thinking of possible peril to his sturdy legs, although for the

moment his thoughts were serious enough, and cast a shadow of distress over his bright countenance. He spoke aloud, impulsively, "Gosh, I forgot again. O God, why dost Thou permit me to forget again, so often? Of a surety I believe that I am not like other men and a sinner, although it is not by my desire." Suddenly he clasped his strong hands and closed his eyes, while his moving lips formed the words, "Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil, O Lord, for verily I fear that I have a wayward heart, as Friend Dyer Dexter sayeth; although I cannot see why using the strong muscles which Thou has given me, to jump with a little, is wrong. Nay, I cannot, for the life of me."

There followed another, but lesser, thud as Mark dropped to his knees for his morning prayer. He had not faced the wall, but instinctively turned toward the open window, through which came the cheerful note of a warbler's song, borne on the fresh spring breeze.

A very few moments later Mark walked sedately into the combination kitchen and dining-room in the footsteps of John Gray. The toil-hardened hands of both were folded, their eyes sedately down-cast.

"I bid thee good morning, Sister Patience. May the spirit of the Lord attend thee throughout this day," said the elder and Patience answered, "And thee, Friend John." But even as she spoke she was

thinking, "How nicely Mark hath parted his hair, this morning! It lieth quite flat, but, alas, his sleeves and pantaloons seem to grow shorter, daily. They are fully three inches too brief, and I have already let the hems down as far as is possible, dear lad."

The smith turned to the window to fill his bellow-like lungs with a few deep draughts of the morning air, and Patience, who had likewise turned, suddenly felt her prim waist seized in the embrace of a sinewy arm and a kiss planted upon her furrowed cheek. With an involuntary start she cried aloud, "Oh!"

"Patience! Hast thou hurt thyself?" inquired Gray, concern in his deep voice.

"Nay, it is nothing, Friend John. I . . . I . . ."

"So, a bear hug from this arm is nothing, is it, Sister Patience?" Mark demanded with a quick laugh. "Then the next time . . ."

"'The next time,' thou wouldst do better to remember that thou art no longer a child to show thy affection in such a boisterous manner, Mark."

"I acted on impulse, father. Mornings like this I somehow forget that I am not still a boy, and thou knowest how dearly I love Patience—she's the only mother I remember. Besides, where is the harm?" A rebellious note had crept into Mark's words.

"In that act of affection, none, except in that it was one more demonstration of thine unconquered impulses, which so often . . ."



“Oh, I know. But I sometimes feel that if men forever hide their real feelings—those which are not really wicked—they are in truth hypocrites, and The Book saith . . .”

John Gray broke sternly in, “Nay, Mark, make not the Bible thine excuse in this matter; thou knowest better than this. The worldly libertines might use such argument as that, and if all men acted in accordance with it, wherein would we differ from the beasts? Self-restraint is a lesson that all have need to learn, and only by learning to conquer our impulses in small things can we strengthen our wills so as to restrain our passions in time of great temptation. That is a fundamental principle of our faith, as thou well knowest. Wouldst thou then stubbornly abnegate it, and seek to be a law unto thyself?”

“Nay, father. Thou art right. It is a lesson that I have need to learn . . . but sometimes I think that I never shall learn it. Somehow it is very hard for me to do. Why? Am I really weak? Am I lacking, wholly lacking, in the Spirit, in spite of the heritage of my blood and the training which thou hast always given me so faithfully? .I don’t feel that that is so, yet something must be wrong with me. What is it, father?”

It was one of the moments when the light-hearted lad felt keenly troubled concerning himself, and his countenance showed the fact so plainly that tears sprang to Sister Patience’s tired eyes and she failed

to see the smith's startled glance in her direction.

"A fault frankly acknowledged is half rectified, Mark. All that thou hast need to do is strive and pray. The spirit is like thy bodily sinews—both require exercise in order to become strong. Exercise thy soul and it will overcome all things. But I do not mean to lecture thee; it is thy battle—the one which every Quaker is commanded to wage. Fight it out for thyself, my son. And now let us all turn our thoughts to the Giver of spiritual strength."

He cleared his throat and began, "The Lord is my shepherd." The voices of the other two—Mark's young and vibrant, Patience's toned to a whisper—joined with his in the familiar verses. Mark kept his blue eyes tightly closed until they came to the lines "Thou preparest a table before me," when, of their own accord, they flew open and turned upon the simple breakfast board. The biggest and rosiest apple atop the rest seemed to wink, tantalizingly, at him as the sunbeams played on its glistening surface. His lips continued mechanically to repeat the words of the psalm, but his mind abruptly switched to mundane matters. "My cup runneth over." Thoughts of the rich, sweet juices with which that apple seemed fairly to be bursting made Mark's mouth water. He stopped speaking for an instant, and barely succeeded in coming in strongly on the closing words, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

If John Gray noticed the young man's lapse he did not indicate the fact, but immediately began the long grace, throughout which Mark's eyes, under partly closed lids, were not to be torn from that luscious specimen of the fruit which the wily serpent had used in tempting mother Eve. "Amen," pronounced the speaker and the youth's itching fingers stretched out and closed upon the appealing apple. But something—perhaps a subconscious realization of the fact that the other's face had taken on a look of pained surprise—caused him to relinquish it; his fingers dropped to the rim of the bowl and he passed it to Sister Patience. Both she and John Gray pointedly avoided taking the choicest specimen, and, now that it was properly his to possess if he would, Mark likewise passed it by and selected the smallest apple in the dish.

He smiled a little, as though amused by his own thoughts. It really was ludicrously small; not large enough even to whet the appetite of such a youthful giant as he was, much less have the least part in satisfying it. Mark glanced at the other two, who were methodically paring their fruit, then at the bone-handled knife beside his own plate. His strong hands suddenly twisted in opposite directions and the apple split into perfect halves. He caught once more the expression of silent reproach and reminder on the smith's face, and his own well-tanned countenance grew slowly crimson.

It was a little, a trivial thing, but many such make

up a day, and Mark's days were replete with unorthodox acts.

The meal silently proceeded for a time. Then the silence was abruptly shattered in a startling manner. From near-by, out-of-doors, there came a sharp explosion like a gunshot, followed instantly by a cry and a splintering crash.



## CHAPTER III

### QUICK CHANGES

AT the first of the three sounds Mark flung his head up, eyes flashing, and broad, shapely nostrils extended. He—a Quaker born and reared amid the environs and precepts of peace—appeared like a warhorse that suddenly hears the din of distant battle! With the first note of the cry he sprang from his chair, which overturned and fell, clattering, behind him. The crash sent him to the window, through which he thrust his big form with surprising agility, to land squarely in the middle of Sister Patience's lovingly tended bed of lavender and Sweet William, and thence to leap for the roadway. He disappeared from the sight of the two whom he left, sitting frozen in their places.

John Gray raised his hands and let them fall back upon the table with a gesture of helpless resignation, and when he turned to glance at the woman opposite him he saw that tears were trembling on the sparse lashes of her downcast eyes.

"Nay, do not weep, Sister Patience. Tears are of no avail. We, who know, have got to gird our loins anew and fight for him, the Lord aiding us."

"Amen," she whispered.



Even as they spoke, a strange alteration was occurring in Mark's behavior. He had taken scarcely a dozen fleet paces down the roadway before he stopped as abruptly as he had started. The intense light faded from his blue eyes; his quivering muscles relaxed and he dropped his head in contrition. For a second time, and the day hardly begun, he felt a sweep of shame over having yielded to unexplained impulse, and spoke aloud, vehemently, "O *God*, what is the matter with me, that I should act thus? Truly I must be possessed, for I could not help it; I just *could* not!"

Equally in anger at himself and in a violent effort to master his impelling desire to run on, he clinched his hands until the nails bit deep into the calloused palms. Just beyond the bend in the road, a few rods distant, the unknown tragedy called. A shot, a cry, a crash, occurring almost simultaneously! These were sounds strange to the peaceful village of Content; they were enough to stir the most lethargic, to arouse one most strictly schooled in self-control. But who, other than he, thought Mark, would have acted as he had just done, spurred on by irresistible impulse to reach the scene of the drama instantly? He would, he must, learn to master himself and the strange urgings within his heart!

With his purposeful jaw sternly set, Mark swung about on his heel. Head up and shoulders squared, eyes turning neither to right nor left so that he might not see the other neighbors whom he heard

coming toward the spot which he was quitting, unseen, he went straight back home. He walked in the unlatched door and to the dining room, where the two other members of the household viewed his abrupt return with renewed astonishment.

"What is it, lad?" demanded John Gray. His tone was not unkind; it held something of implied pardon, something of natural curiosity.

"I do not know. I had but reached the road when I returned to my senses, and to the house, to ask thy pardon . . . again."

The older man debated and made up his mind quickly. Mark had deliberately punished himself, and John knew, likewise, that beneath his cloak of control and humility every nerve was still aquiver with suppressed excitement. After all he was a youth, and adventure was afoot.

"Perchance some one hath been hurt and thou canst be of assistance. Our house is near. Go, my boy."

Mark's eyes betrayed his gratitude. He said nothing, however, but quietly took his flat felt hat from its peg in the hall and walked with measured step, out of the proper exit this time, to the roadway. Then eagerness overcame him and he broke into a run.

Although the sun was yet but little above the rim of the eastern horizon, Content was visibly stirring, and much more quickly than was its wont. Prim-faced women were peering from the windows of

homes which Mark passed; a store-keeper had paused in the act of removing the shutters from his shop; an ancient market wagon was coming down the road at a clip which was far from sedate; and all eyes were focused on the spot which now came into the view of the young man as he turned the curve at a rapid pace.

Already quite a collection of villagers stood clustered together near a bit of the rail fencing which lined the road. Just beyond was a wagon with broken shafts, half in and half out of which stood a trembling old horse. Its owner, Friend Dyer Dexter, was attempting to quiet it by shouting, "Whoa, whoa, whoa" in a high, cracked voice. Mark's seeking eyes caught sight of something red, through a gap in the crowd. His heart-beat quickened with his flying steps. Was it blood? Had some one actually been shot—in Content?

Suddenly he laughed. The cluster of men had parted and disclosed to his gaze the ruddily resplendent body of a touring car. Its front wheels were half out of sight in a deep gully, its hood thrust inquisitively through the broken bars of the fence.

Mark slowed down, but his thoughts continued to race, now in reverse. Almost wholly self-trained as a mechanician though he was, he understood automobiles, for all of the repairing of cars, disabled in minor ways, fell to his lot—John Gray intended to die as he had lived, a simple blacksmith. It required no exceptional mentality to deduce what had oc-



curred; the clues were plain enough. Some city man, who turned night into day, had come tearing down the state highway in his big car, dashed around Smilie's corner, yonder, and met Friend Dyer, jogging storeward behind the bundle of skin and bones he called his horse. Outraged by the sudden appearance of the roaring monster at that unaccustomed hour in the morning, half-blind old Ned had jumped almost out of his skin, not to mention the shafts and harness. As for the owner of the car, he must have first shut off the spark and applied the brake, and almost simultaneously changed his mind and speeded up, realizing that his best chance of avoiding a full collision was to shoot ahead of horse and wagon. "That would very likely have caused a backfiring of the free gasoline, through the muffler, and produced my pistol shot!" thought Mark, laughing again at the absurdity of his excitement. Finally, the automobile could not quite negotiate the sharp turn, at the speed it was going; hence the crash and its present plight.

It was, after all, commonplace enough; nothing very serious had actually happened, yet suddenly Mark felt hot anger swelling up within his heart, and his countenance mirrored the expression of censure which appeared on the faces of most of the other on-lookers. A man who would drive at such a reckless pace was nothing more nor less than a speed maniac and a danger to society; he should not be allowed to have a license, especially he should

not be allowed in Content. Supposing the wagon had held Faith Franklyn, who often drove into the village early in the morning with vegetables from her little farm; and supposing the barely averted accident had turned into a tragedy! There was an element of humor in his righteous indignation against the stranger, since he himself had frequently been guilty of speeding a car which he was testing out, after making repairs thereto.

Unconscious of the fact that he had slightly bumped Dyer Dexter and drawn a black scowl from him, Mark strode forward with words of youthful impetuosity burning on his tongue. A pallid faced, flashily attired young man lolled, rather than sat, upon the seat of the motor car, apparently wholly unconcerned over what had occurred, if the cigarette which hung miraculously suspended from his lower lip were any true indication. At the same instant another unfamiliar form came into view over the lifted hood of the car, as the erstwhile driver who had been poking aimlessly amid the mechanism of the twin six cylinders stood erect. Mark's speech was halted by the latter's words, delivered forcefully in a voice like the rumble of a train in a tunnel, "I'll be hanged 'f I know what's the matter with the thing." At least that is what his remarks boiled down to, although he did not say "hanged" and he did add a number of descriptive adjectives before the word, "thing."

Several of the Quaker on-lookers drew back, with



the expression of stern disapproval deepening on their faces, and one curious Sister made hasty retreat, her hotly flushing face entirely hidden within her sunbonnet.

Mark's heated blood reached the boiling point. He might, thoughtlessly, have spoken the word which David had used, having heard it from the lips of some passing motorist, but profanity was abhorrent to him—Content still classed it not as a venial sin but as a clear breach of one of the Ten Commandments. He stepped through the thinning crowd, and exclaimed, "Friend, thou art commanded not to take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Thou hast just done it, twice, in a very brief sentence, and thou art therefore a double sinner. Furthermore, thou art no gentleman, thus to use profanity where there are women present! We welcome none of thine ilk here."

The burly form of the man addressed straightened up in surprise, and Mark started a little. The stranger might have lacked an inch of his own towering height, and now looked shorter still by reason of the fact that he was standing in the gully. But Mark, who was accustomed to physical bigness, realized that he had never seen such a broad and bulging pair of shoulders, or such tremendous hands as now rested on the top of the hood. By comparison with them the stranger's close-cropped head appeared disproportionately small, and it certainly was ugly. The mouth was broad; the jaw

protruded like a bull dog's; one large ear seemed strangely misshapen; and the whole face was deeply pock-marked, while a white scar ran from one corner of the flattened nose across the cheek to the temple. Yet, for all its ugliness, it was not a repellent face. There were laughter's lines about the corners of the mouth, which now hung open—giving its possessor a look of almost childlike surprise.

For a moment no answer came. Then the stranger ejaculated, "Well, I'll be . . ." He stopped just short of sinning a third time, and took several waddling, flat-footed steps which carried him around the rear of the car and face to face with Mark. He stood, firmly planted on a pair of colossal legs, his hands half-clinched, his arms, whose biceps were as big as a normal man's thighs, swinging slightly back and forth. He looked something like a gigantic and ferocious frog, partially transformed into a man. The youth opposite him felt his own big muscles grow taut again, and the blood pound heavily in his heart. He was angry, not afraid; and he stood his ground without retreating an inch.

Suddenly the other burst forth with a bellow of laughter, his small eyes almost closing in his mirth, and he exploded, "Well, I'll be sanctimoniously blessed! D'yuh get that, Flash? The guy's been lecturin' me—*me*, mind yuh—on cussin'."

As swiftly, the twisted smile faded from his face, giving place to a ferocious scowl. His head seemed

to shrink down amid the bulging muscles of his neck, and he took another step forward. Mark did not budge. Most of the collection of witnesses drew back, but one or two of the stauncher pacifists moved as though to intervene. Fighting was forbidden; besides Mark had unexpectedly become a champion of right and so risen in their esteem. Strong as they knew him to be, he appeared out-matched by this menacing stranger.

Once more the latter burst into rumbling laughter. He shot forth his huge hand and exclaimed, "Put 'er there, Billy Sunday. Yuh may talk like a bloomin' Sunday-school teacher, but you're a game guy . . . and hanged if yuh don't look like one that'd be clever wid his mits. Anyhow, I got tuh hand it to yuh fer havin' the courage of your convictions, as the poet ses, and I'm fer you. Put 'er there!"

What prompted him into unhesitating compliance Mark could not have explained. He seemed suddenly to sense that this mighty man was frank and honorable after his kind, that his heart was placed right, and his own hand went out to meet the other's crushing grip half way. There was an audible gasp, a murmur of protest and disapproval from several of the others. Mark had made terms with the enemy.

The opposition had its usual effect where the youth was concerned, and he answered, heartily, "Thy language is strange and seems to me uncouth,



Friend; but I think that thou art making an apology and if so . . .”

“Yuh got me, the first time, Bo. Sure I was apologizin’, and I’d be pleased tuh do the same tuh the dames, but they’ve went. I cuss considerable, but it don’t mean nothin’—jest sorter lettin’ off steam, like. I don’t go in fer losin’ my temper—don’t pay no dividends—but somethin’s gone and bust itself in the ——, — beggin’ your pardon again, —engine, jest when we was in a big hurry tuh get home. Got outer kilter when she hit the bars, I guess. She ain’t no fence-jumper, but I had tuh put her at it. I’d ruther risk my own neck, and Flash’s here, than kill a hoss—yuh see, I was raised on a farm. Besides, I figgered that me, not havin’ no neck tuh speak of, wasn’t takin’ much of a risk, and Flash, here, wouldn’t have been much of a loss in any case.”

The speaker paused to give vent to a deep throated chuckle at his own exquisite wit, and then added, with a wave of his immense hand toward the non-chalant youth, “Flash, here, claims tuh be my manager, which means that *I* do the work and *he* grabs off ten per cent. of what I pull down. Get me?”

“Nay,” answered Mark, a puzzled expression on his countenance. “I am afraid that I do not entirely understand—thy meaning is a little hidden, Friend. But I do understand what thou hast done, and thy courage was commendable, surely. Thou

. . . thou hast said that friend Flash is thy manager. Art thou, then, a . . . a play actor?"

Perceiving the look of returning disapprobation on Mark's face, the other broke forth in another roar of merriment.

"Play actor. *Play actor!* Gee, ain't that rich, Flash? *Me*, a play actor! No, son. The only kind of an actor I am is a bad actor, sometimes. Say, ain't yuh never heard of 'Bull' Durham?"

Mark brightened a little. He secretly thought himself far better versed in the ways of the world than any of his simple neighbors, and took a boyish pride in displaying his knowledge. Moreover, within his big frame dwelt a soul which was highly sensitive to flattery and ridicule, alike, and he disliked to display ignorance.

"Yea," he responded, promptly. "It is a form of the filthy weed that men smoke. Art thou, then. . . .?"

"A cigarette? Do I look like one, I ask yuh? No, sirree. The fellers got to callin' me 'Bull' fer . . . obvious reasons and most especially on account of my neck lookin' like the gentleman cow's on the advertisement, and the Durham part jest naturally followed. As fer what I am, why . . . Aw, you tell him, Flash, my well-known modesty prevents."



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BULL

THE cheaply resplendent youth, whom he had constantly spoken of as "Flash," paused in the act of lighting a fresh cigarette from the half-inch butt of its predecessor, languidly waved it towards the mountain of muscle and drawled, thinly, "Meet up with 'the Bull'—punk prize fighter when I got hold of him; now wrestler nonpareil. If that's over your head I'll put it into plain English and tell the world that he's the best catch-as-catch-can mat man alive to-day—and Doc Roller, Gotch, Zybyesco and the rest can put that in their pipe and smoke it. They won't let him prove it, for the good and sufficient reason that they're yellow—yellow as that!" Flash extended the saffron-tinted forefinger which held his cigarette.

"Flash likes tuh hear himself talk. I ain't arrove in their class, yet, and he knows it. I'd be gettin' there faster if I had a real manager, 'stead of a dope fiend. No offense, Flash," he added, propitiatingly, and continued. "That's me. Farmer by inclination; wrastler by perfession."

"Wrestler—*by profession?* Surely thou dost not mean that thou engagest in bodily contests for

. . . for money?" inquired Mark, drawing back a step.

"Sure . . . when I can get it, and it's comin' fairly soft these days. Lamp yonder 'Fierce Sparrow' fer confirmation," answered Mr. Durham, and he pointed, with pardonable pride, towards the high priced car. "Yessirree, I ain't got no serious complaints tuh make; it'd be a lot better than farmin', if it wasn't fer havin' to associate with guys like Flash. Now, you . . . course I don't know what you do fer a livin', but I'd like nothin' better than tuh help yuh break intuh the game—you've got the build, kid, you sure have. Lookit the paddin' on them shoulders, Flash!" The Bull's hand descended and Mark, sturdily constructed as he was, winced a little. Whereat the Bull laughed noisily and said, with the pride of a boy, "Some wallop in that mit, kid, even if I didn't amount tuh much in the squared circle. But on the mat! Say, d'yuh ever do any wrastlin', boy?"

"Yea, verily. I have need to wrestle with the Spirit, often," responded Mark, earnestly. "Even as the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness.'"

"D'yuh get that, Flash? He wrastles with the spirit often, ses he. Put an 's' on that and you're in the class of Flash, here. I done some wrastlin' with spirits myself, awhile back, and got throwed

more times than ever I did on the mat. But I cut it out, I cut it out. For one thing they're getting too da . . . blamed scarce and high-toned an opponent, nowadays, seein' as how I live in Philly, not Noo York, so I ain't downed any, lately. Besides, I reformin', I am. First it was booze; now it looks like I'd got tuh cut out cussin'." He winked broadly at his friend, whose thin face went through an evolution which made it appear as though he might have been attempting to smile with his mouth full of sour pickle.

The Bull turned abruptly back to the silent engine, remarking, "Well, we ought tuh be hittin' the pike fer home. It's gettin' considerable past my bedtime, but it sure looks like somethin' was bust, here. Hanged 'f I know what, though." He peered beneath the lifted hood with a comical expression of helplessness on his face, and slowly scratched his close-cropped poll. "I can drive a car as fast as the next guy, but outside of that I'm like the nigger coachman whose boss had him take a six months' correspondence course in chufferin', and then asked him did he understand everythin' about an automobile. Yuh remember it? No? That's good. Flash, here, when I tell him a funny story, always ses, 'Huh, I kicked the foot out uh my cradle laughin' at that one.' "

He stopped, and began to rebusy himself in ineffectual attempts to discover the trouble with the motor, and at last Mark's curiosity overcame him.

“What did the . . . the colored man say?” he asked.

“Say? Well, I’ll be . . . jugged if I didn’t forget tuh finish it, after all. He ses, ses he, ‘Yessah, boss. Ah shore onderstands every last thing about a nautimobile, ’ceptain how de debil it goes without no hoss tuh pull it’ ”

Mark laughed.

“Perchance I may be able to aid thee, friend, for my trade is that of mechanic, and I labor much over disabled motor cars.”

“The h . . . yuh say! Speakin’ of angles, as the poet ses. Well, supposin’ yuh jest jump down intuh this gutter an’ give her the once over.”

Mark moved around beside him and began to make an examination of the motor that had ceased to function, while the talkative wrestler continued in a manner which indicated that his lungs were as sound as his muscles were strong. “Me sayin’, ‘give her the once over’ reminds me of one time when I was on the boards givin’ exhibitions with an English mat man, name of Nelson—‘Half Nelson,’ we called him, naturally. Ever hear of him? Well, I suppose yuh wouldn’t have. I ustuh down him, but not half so easy as the American langwidge did—it sure had a strangle hold on him, but he was game, I’ll say that for him. He was game and always come back fer more. Took most of my val’able time tryin’ tuh teach him it. Well, I remember spendin’ the better part of a week one day



explainin' the meanin' of givin' a doll the 'double O.' What's that? Why, I mean the o-o; the 'once over.' You know. Well, that evenin' a bunch of us guys was strolling down Market Street and at the corner of Broad a couple of chickens passed by, dressed . . . ”

“ ‘Chickens’? ‘Dressed’?” Mark had paused in his work, and now regarded the garrulous talker with bewilderment.

“Sure. Dressed chickens. That's a good one, Flash. *You* know; war paint and feathers up here, nothing much tuh speak of below the knees. Well, the natural thing happened, of course. All of us was willin' to risk a crick in the neck and one eye, as Pat said. Then this English guy speaks up and ses, proud as Punch, 'Aw. That, I presume, is wot you Americans call givin' them the once arfter! Well, rawther!' Lord, can yuh *beat* it, I ask yuh?”

The Bull's laughter cannonaded forth again; Flash smiled wearily, as much as to say, “I'm willing to oblige, occasionally, but it's the ninety-ninth time I've heard that story”: and Mark smiled, too, out of politeness, but with only the vaguest idea of his new acquaintance's meaning and a feeling that perhaps he should not be smiling at all.

The speaker would have continued his reminiscing, but Mark cut him short with the announcement that there appeared to be nothing seriously the matter with the engine, and added, “Verily they con-



struct this kind of a car sturdily and to withstand hard usage."

"That's why I bought it—although Flash, here, liked its sporty lines and the color," answered the other.

"The only thing that is wrong, as far as I can see, Friend, is that the jar severed several of the ignition connections. If we can get the machine to the smithy, yonder, I can make the repairs very quickly, I think."

"Yuh said a mouthful, kid. Come on, Flash. Tumble out and make yuhself useful—you ain't much of a ornament at the best, and at six A. M. you always look like the last few hours of an ill-spent life."

The languid youth dismounted, leisurely, pushed back his lavender cuffs from his slender wrists and took hold of one of the front axles, after first dusting it off with a lavender-bordered handkerchief.

The Bull seized upon the other and cried "Huh!" His side came out of the ditch, partway, but the other remained as firmly fixed as the rock of Gibraltar. Mark, who had been continuing his examination of the engine, stood erect, a little smile on his strong, young countenance. He strode to the side of Flash and, somewhat unceremoniously, shouldered him away, saying, "If thou wilt go and assist the . . . the Bull, I will raise this side."

"Yea. *If* you can," remarked the Bull, wiping the perspiration from his low brow with the back of a grimy hand. "Go along, Flash. Go sit down and smoke a cigarette, fer a change. I don't need no help from *you*. See?"

The two—one broad and bulky, the other tall and sinewy, with muscles which swelled and rippled under his firm flesh—bent together. They straightened legs and backs, and the heavy car came out of the ditch as though lifted by a derrick. A shove and it was back on the road.

"Whew!" ejaculated the Bull, frankly. "Some lift, and you ain't even blowin', kid. Now, by thunder, I'm sure that yuh oughtuh . . . Say, what's the matter? Got a cootie?" His interrogation was occasioned by the look of distress on Mark's face, and his queer posture, for he was bent forward with one arm strained up the middle of his back.

"Nay—at least I know not what a 'cootie' is, but I sadly fear that I have ripped the seam of my coat again."

He had; and, as he turned to display the gaping line of white, the other shouted with merriment. "'Rippin', old top'—as my friend Half Nelson would say. Well, don't let a little thing like that worry yuh."

"But I cannot but be worried. Sister Patience hath sewed many a weary hour upon this garment. . . ."

"As she sews so shall ye rip, as the poet ses. I guess that coat don't owe yuh nothin', kid. Judgin' from its all 'round shortness yuh've had it long enough, I'd say. Anyhow, I'll foot the repair bill—yuh done it helpin' me. Hang the expenses; I've got plenty of them, as the feller ses. I could make a joke about your 'sister Patience' and your 'Sister's patience,' too, but . . . "

"Oh, can it, Bull," interrupted the weary youth. "As a jokesmith you're a darned good prize fighter, and Gawd knows you never got even a draw in the ring. You make me tired."

The childlike grin faded from the Bull's face and he looked hurt, whereupon Mark felt a sudden sympathy for him. Flash was the real bully of the two, it would seem. Mr. Durham's speech might be strange, almost incomprehensible, but quite obviously he was good-natured. The spirit of friendliness fairly exuded from him. Likewise he might be unconventional, uncouth and even wicked, in a way: but he certainly was natural; he said what he thought. To Mark, who often did the same, it was like a refreshing breeze after the pent-up cold storage atmosphere which surrounded most of his consciously restrained neighbors almost like a visible cloud. He found himself liking the stranger, heartily. Mark would have enjoyed telling him so. Instead, he said, "If thou wilt push with me, while Mr. Flash guides the car, we can roll it to the smithy in a moment or two."

The two men of might leaned their united weight on the rear of the tonneau and pushed the machine along while Flash walked beside it, with one hand, the fourth finger of which wore an immense near-diamond ring, resting on the steering wheel. A boy or two of the village lent his lesser aid. All of the older men had departed, one by one. In this fashion they propelled the automobile up a slight rise to the ancient smithy and into the yard, bringing it to a stop beside the damaged wagon of Friend Dyer Dexter, who had preceded them thither. He regarded their coming with a dark scowl, but John Gray merely glanced up from his examination of the smashed shaft, in slight surprise. With his leather apron on and his sleeves rolled up from his big, hairy arms he might have been the prototype for Longfellow's smith, and the Bull regarded him with frank admiration. "Your dad, eh? Bet he'd make the scale go up after I got off," he remarked; then called aloud, cheerfully, "Got another little job fer your establishment, old timer. That skinny friend o' your's deliberately ran me into a fence. I'm going back home and get some of my pals in the legislature tuh pass a bill obligin' all hoss-drawn vehicles tuh carry horns and honk 'em at every cross road, fer the protection of us innocent automobilists." The tooth-displaying grin faded from his face and he gave back Dexter's scowl with compound interest. The latter stumbled back a step and the



Bull laughed. He was like an overgrown boy; an April weather child.

“Aw, I ain’t going tuh eat yuh, you’d stick in my throat like a shad. Ever try one? Jest the same yuh was on the wrong side of the road; I’d ’a made that turn, easy, if you hadn’t been. *What’s that?* Oh, I thought yuh said something. My social errer.” He spoke with an attempt at elaborate politeness which was so ludicrous that Mark smiled, until he felt Dyer Dexter’s close-set eyes boring angrily into him. The smile vanished from his countenance to reappear on that of the Bull, who took a step forward and slapped Dexter resoundingly on the back.

“Aw, don’t feel bad. I’m just spoofin’, as Half Nelson uster say. Know him? Never mind, he uster say it; Englishmen sure talk funny, now don’t they? I leave it tuh you. Guess I was more’n half tuh blame—or Flash, here, was; he was makin’ me hit ’er up—and I’m willin’ tuh have the bill fer fixin’ them shafts tacked on tuh mine. Guess that’s all fair and friendly enough! Shake on it?”

Dexter hesitated, then begrudgingly complied. Mark inwardly smiled. He knew the thoughts which were passing through his neighbor’s mind. He might have sued the city man, but litigation costs money. Besides, one of the shafts had been broken months before, and temporarily patched.

“It is no more than is just, Friend John,” he said, hastily turning to the smith. “I will not say

that the man is not fair, but the fault was his. If he seeks to make amends it is surely not for me to refuse, remembering the Lord's teaching."

"I thought it was something about if a man punches yuh on one side of the jaw let him have a swipe at the other—at least that's what my old Sunday-school teacher taught."

"Nay, then, thou art verily a man wholly of evil, thus to make jest of a text of scripture," flamed Dexter.

"He meaneth no evil, Friend Dyer," hastily interposed Mark. "'Tis but his way. . . ." He found himself addressing the other's stiffly turned back as he marched, rather hurriedly, out of the yard. John Gray accompanied him, and they disappeared in the direction of Dexter's store.

The Bull grimaced and snorted, "A Quaker, ain't he? Gee, they're sure a rummy lot. Didn't I offer, free gratis for nothin', tuh foot his bill—the which will probably be as long as the other guy's whiskers."

"Thou art speaking of my father!" Mark's voice was sharp.

"Sure. That's right, I forgot. Say, I'm sorry, buddy. I was jokin'."

"There are times when thy jokes are ill-considered, then," was Mark's stiff response.

"And about as funny as a punch in the eye," remarked Flash, sourly. And Mark suddenly felt like apologizing.

## CHAPTER V

### AN UNSOUGHT LESSON

BUT a moment before, Mark had been earnestly championing Mr. Durham, insisting that "it was only his way." Now he thought, contritely, "If I really meant what I said to Friend Dyer Dexter, why could I not have smiled when he spoke with seeming disrespect of father's beard? Verily, it mattereth much whose ox is gored. Then, instead of making allowances for the fact that his speech is not like ours, I was angry and spoke in a manner to hurt his feelings. And then, when I was sorry, I said nothing—I made no apology. Indeed, I cannot understand myself; I am quick in temper, reluctant to acknowledge a fault. Altogether I am sadly lacking in the true spirit of Christian humility, and I know not how to cure myself."

Shaking his head, sorrowfully, the young Quaker walked into the shop to procure such tools as he needed to make the simple repairs. Flash lounged after him, attracted, perhaps by the subconscious appeal of the ruddy charcoal fire within the blackened, broad-mouthed chimney. At the door he paused to lean against the lintel and gaze with bored curiosity about the place and at the clutter of implements

appertaining to that ancient and honorable trade. The indescribably pungent odor which clings to every smithy offended his nostrils, and he drew from his silver cigarette case another "coffin nail"—as he would have described it. Mark turned just in time to see him light it and carelessly flip away the still-burning match, which struck in a pile of rubbish and lay there, smoldering and sending up a tiny wraith of blue smoke. With two strides he reached the spot and extinguished the match beneath his heavy, square-toed boot.

"Thou hast apparently failed to observe the sign above thy head, which enjoins thee from smoking here, Friend Flash," he remarked, in a voice that was ominously calm.

The man addressed heard only the words. He grinned, showing his uneven, yellowed teeth, took a deep puff, removed the cigarette from his lips, flicked off the ashes with a disdainful jerk of his finger, and very deliberately blew a cloud of thin, aërated smoke into Mark's face.

Mark coughed. Then, for a moment, utter surprise held him statuelike. The only visible change which occurred in him was the quick flush that swept over his face and receded to leave it almost pale. Inwardly, he experienced again that tumultuous surge of red-hot blood through all the upper part of his body; the muscles of his hand contracted involuntarily, his nerves tingled. Before his eyes appeared a red mist, like a shimmering veil dropped



down in front of them. It was nothing new. He had felt the same, momentarily, time and time again from the days of his earliest recollection, and it always presaged some outburst which left him both ashamed and disgraced.

"I *must* keep my temper. I *must* control myself, now," he thought. "He is unbearable, still he is but half my size, and if I strike him I may kill him. I *must*. . . ."

Even as Mark was thus mentally adjuring himself, impulse forced him to take a stride towards the other, and an expression crept into his face which caused Flash to retreat, suddenly repentant of his temerity and on the verge of panic. Then, as quick as a thought, the Quaker's long arms shot out. His hands closed on either side of his insulter's slender waist and he lifted him at full arm's length clean off the ground. Flash squirmed and kicked out, frantically, and called, "Bull! Bull!" but it availed him not at all. Writhing in his human vise he was borne out of the door and straight to the ancient trough. He looked down over his shoulder to see the murky water right below him. But only the bottom edge of his loudly checked and flaring coat-tails were destined to make its intimate acquaintance. He himself was set, deliberately and firmly, on the wooden edge. The cigarette fell from his nerveless fingers, hissed, and became a harmless sodden thing.

"Thou seest, Friend, that thou canst *not* smoke

in the smithy.” Mark spoke in a tone which was actually mild, such as one might use in addressing a young child.

The Bull, standing beside the car, his mouth wide open with astonishment, had been a speechless witness of this swiftly acted little drama. Now that it was ended, he dropped ponderously down upon the low step of the machine, leaned his head back against the door and set to laughing so prodigiously that the tears came to his screwed-up eyes. When he found himself able to speak, he shouted, “Oh, ho, HO! Nay, friend Flash, thou canst *not* smoke in the smithy. That’s evident; that’s perfectly plain. I’ll tell the world it is. Oh, wait till I tell the gang about how we’ve been reformed. First I’m cured of cussin’; then you’re cured of cigarette smokin’. We’re gettin too good tuh be true, we are.”

He sprang up with a display of surprising agility and thumped Mark resoundingly between the shoulder-blades. “It’s a crime fer them muscles of yours tuh be goin’ tuh waste in this here dead hole; it’s a cryin’ shame, that’s what it is, kid. You come along with me. Chuck your two-for-a-cent job, here—yuh won’t regret it, I’m tellin’ yuh. Wrastlin’; that’s what y’ought tuh be doin’. I’ll learn yuh, and grub-stake yuh till yuh get a start. Yessiree, I’ll guarantee tuh make a first-class wrastler outer yuh; one that’ll make ’em all sit up and take notice. Easy money; nice close; an auty-

mobile—yuh can have 'em. What d'yuh say, bo?"

His enthusiastic insistence was infectious. Mark could not help thrilling a little at it, particularly since tucked away in a hidden corner of his heart he had the virile youth's longing for adventure. The call of the far places, of the great city where it seemed stirring romance must have habitation, was by no means unknown to him. And the very force of the Bull's deep voice shook him. Nevertheless, Mark responded with commendable promptness.

"I say that, although I much appreciate thy kindness in making such an offer, I could not think of accepting, as thou thyself must know, Friend. I do not like to think evil of thee, for thy heart indeed seemeth to be kindly, but thy profession is surely an evil one. Are we not taught to avoid contention and abhor conflict? If we may not, then, fight even in a cause which seemeth righteous, wouldst thou tempt me to assault my fellow men for pay?"

Seeing that he was no longer the object of Mark's attention, Flash slipped from his uncomfortable seat, and stood regarding him with an expression that was both bitterly hostile and sneering.

"Aw, shucks!" retorted the Bull. "Business is business, and mine's legit. It ain't prize fightin'. Besides, what's the difference, anyway, between poundin' a hoss-shoe and another guy, if he's willin', and ready tuh give as good as he gets, I'm askin'



yuh? It's all in the game, kid; all in the game. And, believe me, there's plenty of guys who'd a da . . . a hanged sight ruther get hit in the face than the pocketbook, which is where you, and the rest that are in the buyin' and sellin' business, hit 'em."

"Nay. That is false philosophy. 'A laborer is worthy of his hire.' Thou art not such."

"Ain't I though? Believe me, I earn what I get. And I ain't goin' around robbin' folks, profiteerin' in the necessities of life, like plenty of sanctimoni-ous cusses that think they're too darned good to associate with me. They don't have tuh give up their dough tuh see me and another guy roll around on a mat, unless they want tuh. I ain't injurin' nobody. I'm a luxury, see? A luxury, that's me."

He put his head back and laughed loudly at the idea.

"Nay, I do not see it. Thou art rather a temptation to those whose animal lusts make them crave the excitement of contention," Mark sternly retorted. "And I have heard that such are often the least able to afford it—the money they pay thee is food taken from the mouths of hungry children; clothes taken from their backs."

"Careful, kid!" The Bull was scowling, now. "No guy can talk like that tuh *me*, and get away with it."

"Perhaps I should not have spoken so. I meant no personal offense for . . . for I like thee, Friend.



But that is how it seems to me. Besides, thou art surely injuring thyself for . . . ”

“Oh, yuh don’t get hurt; none tuh speak of, anyhow. You’re likely tuh pound your own finger sometimes, ain’t yuh? Or drop a anvil, or some-thin’, on your foot?”

“I did not mean physical hurt, but spiritual. Thou canst not attack thy fellow man without being angry, and anger . . . ”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Bo; dead wrong. Business is business, and my mat motter is ‘always keep your temper, Bull.’ If the other guy gets mad, all right. That’s his look-out, and so much the worse for him. He’s pie fer yuh, then. Why, even the parsons in the army recommend boxin’ and wrastlin’; say it’s good discipline; makes men. I say so, too. Yuh gotter keep your temper, see?”

Mark could not help smiling, faintly, the other was so deeply in earnest. “Perhaps thou art right—thou and ‘the parsons’—I had not thought of that. But I sadly fear that I could not keep mine, in such a case, for I am quick to wrath, as thou hast observed, although I belong to the Society of Friends. In truth, I fear that there is that within my heart which would cause me sinfully to delight in such contests of strength, and . . . ”

“Sure yuh would! Sure yuh’d like it!”

“And therefore the more reason for my refusing to engage in it. Nay, ‘get thee behind me, Satan.’ ”

The Bull sighed, prodigiously. “Oh, . . . thun-

der! Well, you're your own boss, I s'pose. If yuh won't, yuh won't—and 'that's that,' as Half Nelson ustuh say. Yuh may be a Quaker but you're as mulish as a Britisher! But it's a crime, I'm tellin' yuh. You're buryin' your talents in a tablecloth, as somebody—who was it?—said."

Mark made no answer, but turned to bend over the disabled motor and begin his task of setting it to functioning again. The Bull leaned curiously over one of his shoulders, and after a minute Flash took his place on the other side, after lighting a fresh cigarette with hands which were not altogether steady. His show of bravado was obviously for his companion's benefit, but he was very careful to blow the smoke away from Mark.

Completely absorbed in his work and almost unconscious of the other two's presence, the laborer shortly began to follow his custom and sing as he worked, subconsciously selecting the appropriate hymn, "Blest be the Tie that Binds." His voice was fresh and pleasing, and he sang lustily. After a moment of astonished listening, Flash winked at the Bull, behind Mark's bent back, and started in competition a popular number, the refrain of which began with the unconventional words, "Oh, by gee, by gosh, by gum, by Jove." At first it was little more than a quavering breath, but as nothing happened he sang out with more confidence, retreating out of the reach of his rival singer's arms, however. The Bull grinned.

The sense of the song, and its intent, at length penetrated into Mark's mind. He stopped and glanced up, both angry and shocked. But instead of rebuking the singer, either verbally or physically, he compressed his lips into a straight line, indicative of his conscious effort toward self-restraint, and continued his work.

“‘O by Jingo said by gosh by gee,’” chanted Flash, airily. He might have been singing to the high heavens or merely for his own amusement, so innocent did he appear. When he had completed the refrain he promptly began it anew, and Mark, forcing himself to work on as though he did not hear, suddenly realized that he was softly whistling through his teeth in unison with the singer the ragtime song with its jingling melody and catchy rhythm. He instantly checked himself, feeling a flush of mortification and anger creeping into his cheeks. The challenge was too much. He resumed his hymn in a voice so stentorian that his rival's breathy tenor was completely drowned out.

Vastly amused, Durham gave vent to a huge chuckle. He sensed and appreciated Mark's self-restraint under a type of provocation which was familiar enough to him. Flash constantly took advantage of his physical inferiority to act the bully, and the Quaker's victory was delightful. This time he had not used those brawny arms, beneath the skin of which the sinews rippled like whipcords. He had discarded his coat, and they stood out, sharply de-



fined, through the thin cotton shirt now stretched taut over his broad shoulders. Twice the Bull shook his massive head; once he muttered, "It's a cryin' shame; a cryin' shame!"

It is odd how men in every walk of life by instinct appraise others of their kind, jealously, admiringly or merely curiously. Let one opera singer hear another, and he must hum the climax note to find out if he could not produce one higher—or lower; the speaker listen critically to the speaker and wonder if he could not, perhaps, have bettered a well-turned phrase; the athlete view another athlete's muscular form and speculate whether or not he could not out-run or out-lift him. So with the Bull, now. Mark's muscles held a wordless challenge for him. He was curious to know what the youth would do if subjected to any particular one of the scientific holds which comprise a wrestler's system of attack. Of course he would be utterly lacking in knowledge of the theoretical defenses, but he was nearly as big as himself, perhaps fully as strong; and he was lithe and young. Educated in "the tricks of the trade," what a training partner he would make! The Bull's engagement on the previous night had been a perfunctory and easy one, and even the long ride had not wearied him. Now his fingers itched to grapple with Mark. He wanted to try out his strength and his mettle alike.

Suddenly his homely face brightened and took on a look which was almost mischievous.



"Say, kid," he began, "Tell yuh what I'll do, jest for the fun of it. There's a nice, smooth bit of turf, here, and I'll learn yuh two or three wrastlin' holds, free gratis fer nothin'. They might come in handy, sometime. Yuh never can tell. And most guys pay real money tuh learn 'em," he added, significantly.

"Nay." Mark smiled a little, but did not raise his head.

"Aw, c'mon! There ain't no harm in it; it's jest foolin'. C'mon. I bet I can put yuh flat on your back in less'n half a minute. Get out your watch, Flash."

Mark involuntarily straightened up. The taunt brought with it that swift and inexplicable quiver in his nerves; the involuntary flexing of his muscles. Restraint cost him an effort, but he succeeded in smiling frankly and replied, "Nay, I say. I wish for no lessons in fighting—yea, wrestling is but a form of fighting. Rather I have need to learn how to avoid contention. It is a temptation to which I yield all too easily. Besides, thou knowest that I do not bet."

The other sensed the effect of his words and his advantage. "Then I jest tell *yuh* that I can do it. You think you're pretty beefy, but brains is what counts, and I can prove it. C'mon; be a sport."

As he spoke, the Bull began playfully to push Mark towards the strip of spring greensward beside the water trough. Still retaining his good-nature,

the other only half-resisted, but the "feel" of the wrestler's mighty muscles in their play against his breast caused his own to tingle and beg for permission to exert themselves in opposition.

"I cannot, Friend, as I have thrice told thee," he protested. "Besides, thou art wasting my time."

"Aw, charge that on the bill, too. I'm payin', to-day. Look. Here's a trick worth knowin', in a pinch."

With a quickness which was nothing less than amazing in one so bulky, the Bull bent over, and thrust one huge arm between Mark's legs, planted slightly apart in his effort to resist the other's shoving. With his shoulder as a fulcrum he heaved upward, meanwhile grasping one of the youth's wrists with his free hand, and pulling his arm sharply downward and forward. To Mark's choking consternation and astonishment he instantly found himself upside down and sliding headfirst down the wrestler's back. In another fraction of a second he was viewing a topsy-turvy world through the Bull's pedestal legs, while his own were held on high in a grip like iron.

Gravity, as well as sudden passion aroused by the trick, caused the blood to rush to his head. The misty red veil was spread before his sight, and he flung his own strong arms about the other's calves so fiercely that the Bull was thrown off his balance. With a thud the two went to the earth, together.

The jar took Mark's breath away, for an instant, but he heard a shrill "Yah," in Flash's voice, and the words, "Now yuh got him, Bull. Flop! Give him the scissors! Give him the toe-hold."

The words meant nothing to him until they were translated into lightning-like action by his adversary. The fall had partially loosened the hold of each. Now the Bull twisted wholly free and flung himself over onto Mark. His tremendous legs closed and locked about the Quaker's neck and instantly began to contract with crushing force. They shut off his wind; his head felt as though it were being ground between an upper and nether millstone; there was a roaring in his ears. It did not seem possible—such applied power in a human frame. Mark struggled with all his strength, twisting, writhing. The next instant one of his feet was seized in both the wrestler's huge hands and twisted sidewise. The pain was excruciating.

Then, as quickly, he was free. Through a mist of pain-drawn tears he looked at the Bull, who was sitting beside him and now almost doubled up with laughter. Mark felt himself in the grip of a passion such as he had never dreamed of. That moment he could have killed the stranger.

"See. That's jest a little sample of my line of goods, kid, but it's a trick worth knowin', now ain't it? The scissors and toe-hold, used together or separately, have caused the down-fall of many a good man, me included. Say, you ain't mad, are



yuh? I was jest foolin'; I didn't mean to hurt yuh." There was sudden dismay and real pain in the Bull's voice.

Mark, pale of face and with his now deeply seated wrath making his speech thick and strange to his own ears, panted out his answer, as he got unsteadily to his feet. "Nay, thou didst not hurt me, blast thee. And thou canst not do that again!"

With fists clinched and arms rigid at his sides, he stood, leaning forward and swaying slightly. His jaw protruded and his gray eyes, over which his hair had fallen, burned and bored straight into those of the Bull, where concern dwelt.

"Steady, kid! Honest, I was only foolin'—'though maybe I got a bit rough. You was usin' some strength yourself, yuh know. I'll say you're game; yuh got fightin' qualities. But you ought-n't tuh get mad. Don't forget what I told yuh. Always keep your temper. When there's blood in your eye yuh can't see straight."

Mark succeeded in laughing, although the sound was strange to his own ears. He dashed the lock of hair back, and smiled grimly; the blood still ran like liquid fire through his veins. "I . . . I am not angry . . . now," he answered, and knew that he was speaking falsely. "I am not angry, but . . . thou canst not do that again."

"Maybe not; maybe so. But I ain't likely tuh try it. A wrastler that uses the same trick twicet in succession is a nut. C'mon, if yuh like. I told yuh



I'd learn you a few things and there's no time like the present, as the feller said."

The Bull, too, had risen. He now stood facing Mark, his feet planted widely apart—like a Colossus of Rhodes—his body bent forward, with arms swinging loosely. Mark "came"! He lurched forward like a human catapult. They clinched and remained for a moment, breast to breast, swaying a little from side to side but neither giving an inch of ground. Theirs was the inertia of equal forces adversely applied. Flash viewed them with lips drawn back from his yellow teeth in a grin that was half snarl. He was like a fox watching two fighting bears.

Suddenly the Bull collapsed, falling backwards and giving Mark a violent jerk. Completely taken off his guard, the Quaker shot through the air over the recumbent body of his adversary, and fell prone and sprawling. Renewed anger and deep mortification alike filled his heart; and his mouth was full of young grass and loam. He spat it out, and running his tongue over his dry lip realized that it was cut. There was the slightly saline taste of blood in his mouth.

Again the fall had broken their mutual grasp and Mark scrambled hurriedly to his feet and wheeled about to meet the next attack. Nothing happened. To his surprise he saw, through angry eyes, a ludicrous sight. Panting just a little from his latest exertion, the Bull had instinctively fallen

into his favorite posture of defense. He was resting on wide-spread knees and elbows; his hands locked on his wrists, back humped up and head dropped so low that it was scarcely to be seen beneath the muscles of his neck which bulged out over his silken collar. He looked more than ever like some mammoth frog, or a turtle. But Mark did not then see the humor in the spectacle, nor pause to consider the why of the wrestler's posture. With a cry he leaped upon him, astride his waist, encircling his thick chest with both arms and tugged and strained with all his might. Scarcely an inch could he move the Bull.

At last he lifted his head and shook the hair back from before his eyes—only to find himself looking directly into the horrified faces of the smith and Dyer Dexter, who had returned from the latter's store with some bolts for the new shafts.

## CHAPTER VI

### DOMESTIC SERIO-COMEDY

“DAVID! David, where art thou?”

Standing on the side porch of her farm home, in the checker of sun and shadow as the light sifted through the rose-covered trellis, Faith made a picture of sweet young womanhood worthy the brush of a Raphael. The Quaker calm which softly illumined her face, and the simple garb, gave her a look suggesting the mild and lovely Madonnas, but there was nothing nunlike about the fresh bloom of her cheeks. Faith was all woman; akin to the angels in purity of soul which shone out through her eyes, but sweetly mortal nevertheless. Not a radiant beauty, but a lovely girl whose charm was now enhanced by the faint violet shadows of concern in her expressive eyes.

A basin of soapy water stood at her side and she wiped her hands with the towel, which had just imparted an extra glow to the rosy cheeks of little Hope, as she looked gardenward for the truant David. Again she sent her call out on the soft spring air. Her voice was low-pitched and pleasing, but now it was touched with a barest trace of annoyance.

"Yea, sister Faith. I am coming, I'm hurrying."

Scarcely suiting his action to the word, David now appeared out of the fringe of a little grove near by, a home-made sling in his right hand making rapid circles in the air. As he approached, lag-gardly, well knowing what was in store, his sister continued, "Come quickly, David, if thou wishest to accompany me to the village. Why hast thou not been helping Friend Jeremiah weed the garden, as I bade thee? Where hast thou been, and what hast thou in thy hand?"

By this time the lad had reached the porch step and he proudly displayed the home-made implement which he had constructed with two pieces of twine and a bit of leather from an old harness.

"See," he explained. "I made it, although Jeremiah showed me how. It's a sling-shot, sister Faith—like the one the psalmist David used to slay the Philistines with. Thou placest a stone here, in the leather, like this. Then . . . "

The boy made several violent revolutions with his weapon of primitive warfare, let loose one of the string ends, and away shot the missile at a wild tangent, clipping the tail-feathers of the vain-glorious cockerel that was lording it over his busy harem near by. The rooster gave a frightened squawk and fled, half running, half flying. It was hard to say whether he were creature of the earth or air. With a wail, Hope started in pursuit, calling



back over her shoulder, "Naughty, naughty David. I *hate* thee."

"David! See what thou hast done! Have I not told thee, times without number, that we are forbidden to use weapons of destruction? What does the Bible say about him who taketh the sword?"

"I . . . I have forgotten. But I know that it sayeth, 'Blessed be the Lord, my strength, who teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight,' " quoted the lad, triumphantly, having been recently coached in the verse by one who worshiped the ground that Faith trod upon, yet was constantly troubling her soul with his mischief-making proclivities.

Years before, when she had been the age of little Hope, Jeremiah Jones, hoboing it along the dusty road passed the Franklin farm, and had paused to beg a drink of spring water from her father, "in the name of Christ." In his burning eyes and shrunk cheeks, deathly white save for two crimson patches above the stubby beard, the kindly Quaker had read the signs of destroying fever. He had taken him in, this Philistine whose incoherent ravings, while the desperate illness lasted, had been a strangely mixed jargon of the farm and city's slums. They knew not whence he came or what his life had been before, but it made no difference to them. Faith's gentle father and mother, true salt of the earth, would have taken in a stray dog and cared for him just as tenderly. When the strange wayfarer with

the prophet's name was well again, they would have sent him on his way with their—and God's—blessing. But he would have none of it. Perhaps his motive was a mixed one—whose is not? At least it is fair to say that their kindness, the like of which he had never known in all his life, uncovered a strain of doglike gratitude in the thin breast of Jeremiah. From that moment he was their slave, although a lazy one. Even if they had wished to drive him away from their doors it is doubtful if they could have done so.

He preëmpted for himself the barn loft and made a room of it, to which he always returned, repentant and truly ashamed, after each attack of the old wanderlust which occasionally lured him away for days and even weeks at a time. Thus, year after year, Jeremiah Jones had lived with and served the Franklyn family for his board, such cast-off clothing as fell to his lot, and the pittance which they could pay him. He would undoubtedly have served with equal willingness had they been able to pay him nothing. After the death of Faith's parents—three years previous when she was but seventeen—he had stayed on, more devoted than ever, her ragged knight. Without his aid, indeed, she would have been utterly unable to have fought the good fight and kept her little family together. Responsibility had improved the man, and his falls from grace had been infrequent after Mr. Franklyn's death.

Perhaps the old fire which will not let the hobo

rest, was burning out, for he was now well past middle-life, and becoming set in his ways. He was still scrawny and somewhat bent, with eyes which were near-sighted and watery, sunken cheeks and a hooked nose set slightly askew on his face. Nor did he appear to be over-clean, as a general thing; yet a strange out-cropping of the vanity which abides in the heart of every man, no matter how low his station in the social scale, caused him to cover his almost naked poll with an ill-fitting wig, deep seal brown in color, although his beard was almost white. Beard? It was rather an uneven stubble which was never removed, yet never seemed to grow beyond the half-inch limit.

At first the presence of this bit of human flotsam in the homogeneous village had given rise to much adverse criticism of Friend Daniel Franklyn, despite the clear Biblical sanction, nay, injunction. But in time Jeremiah had been accepted as a fixture in Content, and his vagaries, although oft the subject of shocked comment among the Quakers, frequently secretly amused them. And many a child had been repeatedly punished for spending hour upon hour listening eagerly to his never-ending stories, for he was as prolific in the making of strange tales as Scheherazade of the Thousand and One Nights.

He had never made an effort to become one of the Friends, although sometimes he slipped unobtrusively into the Meeting House on a Sabbath, to sit,



silent with the rest, an amused expression on his odd face. Yet he was not without knowledge of the Bible. Friend Daniel had given him one, early in his stay, and he read it assiduously, if painfully. Not always from the highest motives, it must be admitted, but rather to discover portions which might be quoted to Quaker discomfiture. Thus he had taught David, when he was barely able to talk, one verse which the child recited gleefully during a gathering for Scripture reading and prayer at the Franklyn homestead; "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and for thine often infirmities." And the dwellers in Content were strict prohibitionists, even in those days!

Faith had no difficulty in surmising the source of David's disturbing quotation, now. But before she could think of the proper manner of correcting him, he went on, "It was the Bible David, who used the sling-shot to kill the giant, Goliath, before he cut off his head, that said it, I think. Anyway, Jeremiah saith that he was some scrapper. And I mean to be one, too, when I grow up."

"Nay, thou dost not know what thou art saying. Oh, I shall of a verity have to let Jeremiah go, if he continueth to teach thee, and thy sister Hope, things like that. Though I know not how I can manage without him."

"But it is true; it is in The Book," protested the boy.

"I know, David. There are many things in the



Bible which we must not take literally, but rather to teach us a lesson. Jeremiah did not tell thee all the story of David. Later he was very, very sorry that he had been a man of war. Because his hands were stained with blood the Lord would not let him have his wish, and build the great temple at Jerusalem. So, thou seest, he was punished because of his sin—as we all must be, if we do wrong. And fighting is a sin; war is a sin. The gentle Savior taught us that, and we, who bear the name of Friends, try to follow in His footsteps.”

“Yea, I suppose so. Perhaps I shall not be a warrior, sister Faith, but if I practice a long while with my sling-shot I can use it to protect thee with.”

“Thank thee, dear. But I do not need to be protected. Who would hurt me?”

“I don’t know, exactly. May be there are still some bears in the woods—Jeremiah says that there are—or some Indians might come back from the west.”

“Nay, there is no fear from bears or Indians. Thou art much more likely to kill some of our chickens—which we can ill afford to lose—as thou hast just nearly done. Besides, we should love all dumb creatures.”

“Even skonks and snakes, sister Faith? Jeremiah saith . . . ”

The girl started a little, and hastily concealed a budding smile. “Yea, even skunks and snakes. God made them. It is perhaps as well to love them

at a distance, but at least we should not injure them needlessly. I want thee to grow up kind to all created things, man and beast alike, and it hurts me to hear thee talking about fighting and killing, David."

"Then I won't, sister Faith. I won't talk about them and I'll try not to think about them . . . much. Is . . . is wrastling, fighting?"

"I don't know. Perhaps not. Why dost thou ask?"

"Jeremiah hath been showing me and some of the other boys how to wrastle, and he told us all about the wonderful stunts a wrastler did, that he saw in the big city—the time he went away and stayed 'most a week. Dost thou remember?"

"Of a surety I do." Faith's lips assumed an uncompromising straight line, but the boy did not observe it, and continued, eagerly, "He saith that the wrastler was a reg'lar Bull . . . that was his name, too, I think. Anyway, he was terribly strong. He could throw a . . . a guy quicker'n blazes . . . Jeremiah said the word, I'm just *telling* thee. And hundreds and hundreds of people go to watch him do it, and pay money. Jeremiah did; he sat up in the . . . some sort of a nut gallery. Gee, . . . I mean . . . Well, anyway I'd like to be strong like that, and wrastle. If it isn't wicked."

"I'm afraid that *that* kind of wrestling is—very wicked. Oh, David, what am I going to do with thee, and Jeremiah? He putteth such thoughts in

thy receptive mind. Just now thou saidest 'G' which is again akin to profanity, for it is the initial of God. And thou stopped thyself, showing that thou knewest it to be wrong."

"Yea, I am sorry, again, sister Faith. I told him what thou saidest about . . . about that other word, and he said, 'Faith is right Dave. She's always right. I won't use that word any more, danged if I do.' "

Hope had returned, carrying the immense rooster tucked under one chubby arm, and she now broke into the conversation with, "What ith 'danged,' thithter Faith? Jeremiah ith *danged*, lots of times."

"Oh, dear. I don't know what it is! But it doth not sound very nice, doth it? I wouldn't ever be . . . be danged, if I were thee. But come, David. Thou hast not yet told me why thou wert not helping Jeremiah to weed the garden as I bade thee? He wasteth his time telling thee stories and teaching thee to wrestle; thou spendest thine making sling-shots; but the weeds take none off from growing and they are even now choking out the vegetables, which we must sell to live. Sometimes I scarcely know where the morrow's meals are coming from, and at the best it is terribly hard to make both ends meet without a real man on the farm. We are poor, David. We have almost nothing—but each other."

"But why do we have to be poor, like that? Any-

way thou art not wicked, that God should hate thee," cried the boy.

"He doth not hate any of his children. Thou must not speak like that."

"Then why are we poor when Friend Dyer Dexter is rich. He is, everybody saith so; and stingy, too. He's a rich old miser—Jeremiah . . . "

"Oh, please don't be all the time repeating what Friend Jeremiah saith. Friend Dyer is a good man; a just man, David."

"He is a 'sanctimonious cuss,' Je . . . somebody said. He's all the time talking about the Scripture but he never read the verse 'the greatest of these is charity.' Why did he skip that one, sister Faith? I should think . . . "

"Of course he hath read it. Who told thee that? Nay, I know."

"Then if he hath, dost thou not suppose that he would give thee some of his money if thou shouldst ask him?"

His sister felt herself flushing swiftly, and turned away so that even his boyishly inquisitive eyes should not notice her confusion.

"Wouldn't he?" David persisted.

"I . . . I do not know. At least, I am not sure. And why should he? We do not want his money. We do not want anybody's charity, do we, Davie? Isn't it much nicer to be independent, even if we are poor?"

"Well, maybe. Please don't look as though thou



wert going to cry, sister Faith. I don't want any of his old money, anyway. I mean to make a lot, for thee, when I grow up. That's one reason I thought I'd sort of like to be a wrastler, like the bull man. Then we could have a big automobile, like the one that went whizzing past this morning, to carry our vegetables to Friend Dyer Dexter's store in the village—a bright red one like that," announced David, his eyes glowing.

"I'd rather have a blue one," Hope interposed.

Faith smiled again. "We'll decide on the color when we get it. I am afraid it is sinful to set thy little heart on a worldly luxury like a motor car, but perhaps it will help thee to weed better. For we must all work, David. Mankind was commanded to till the soil and earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. And even little men, like thee, should learn how to labor, for it maketh thee strong, surely as well as wrestling doth. Look at thy big Friend Mark! How strong he is, and yet he doth not wrestle." (If she might only have seen him a few moments previous!) "Oh, it is a fine thing to work, cheerfully, and earn for ourselves the simple things which our bodies need. There is surely nothing nobler on earth."

"Well, perhaps so. I like to work for thee. But I like to play, for myself, sometimes. Jeremiah saith that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Thou wouldst not like to have me that, sister Faith."

"Nay." The girl sighed. "But it is like play for thee to drive to the village and watch the sparks in the smithy, so come and wash thy face and hands clean, that's a good boy. David! *Clean*, I said. Thou hast not touched thine ears. Look at thy little sister, as fresh and spotless as a little rose-bud after a rain."

"Aw, but girls like to be washed," rebelled the lad.

"Nay. Thou art telling an untruth, Davie," answered Hope, in flat contradiction. "I do not like to be wathed—but I like to be clean. Dirt ith nathty."

"Then we're all nasty, for the Bible sayeth that God made man out of . . . Faith. Thou art getting the soap into my eyes. Ouch! it stings!"

David broke free from his sister's grasp, and ran, half blinded by the lye in the home-made soap, down the driveway towards the road.

With her plain gray skirt held high, to give free play to her shapely limbs, Faith gave chase, for the moment more girl than woman. Simultaneously the pair reached the gate—just as the Bull's automobile appeared around a turn in the highway, only a few yards distant.

## CHAPTER VII

### REACTIONS

DURING the quarter hour in which the foregoing little domestic drama—mild comedy with its hint of pathos—was being enacted at the Franklyn homestead, the situation at the smithy had undergone another quick change.

At the startling reappearance of John Gray and Dyer Dexter, with amazement and wrath written plainly on their countenances, Mark's grasp on the wrestler immediately relaxed. His position was not one from which he could retire with grace, and he stumbled awkwardly to his feet and stood with his eyes bent towards the ground and hands clasped and working nervously. He was still panting, disheveled, shamefaced.

Mark was in a most distressful situation. Shame contended with anger at himself, the stranger, and Friend Dyer, in whose eyes he had caught a momentary gleam that was actually triumphant, with no attempt at dissembling. His oft-made prophecy that this youth would surely come to some bad end seemed on the way to swift fulfillment. Within a brief half hour Mark Gray had first openly made friends with a professional wrestler who had gained

the odium of the whole village, and then fallen to *fighting* with him! He did not wait for the lad's explanation—perhaps he did not wish to hear it. Was not the matter plain, on the face of it? Had he not with his own eyes seen Mark—his face covered with blood and dirt, his clothes soiled—assaulting the stranger; pummeling him, when he was down?

Here was a choice morsel of gossip! And, whether little David's quoted characterization of him were deserved or not, Dyer Dexter was always glad to share such a possession, at least. He was not at all a deep-dyed villain; far from it. Indeed, he undoubtedly regarded himself as a man of impeachable character. Certainly he kept the ten commandments to the letter. The eleventh is less literal, and what constitutes compliance with it is more or less a matter of personal judgment. Nor was he without provocation in his attitude towards Mark. The latter had, as a boy, singled him out as the victim of most of his venial pranks, with a boy's instinct for making game of one who lacks good sportsmanship. And now he had another cause of grievance against him. Perhaps it is too much to say that the repressed, dried-up man of sixty was in love with Faith, but at least he had decided that he desired her for his wife. A number of sound considerations entered into that desire. He was cautious; he had not yet actually declared himself, but he had made several preliminary overtures. Mark was not



openly Faith's suitor, but the calculating mind of the older man recognized in him a dangerous rival. Business was business, and if the youth elected to behave in such a manner as to remove himself from the race, that was *his* look-out.

Dexter abruptly turned his straight, censorious back on the group and walked storewards again.

Still on hands and knees, the Bull raised his head and took in the picture, while a sheepish grin appeared on his face and spread until it threatened to bisect it. With the agility of a gymnast he sprang to his feet and exclaimed, boisterously, "'Sall right, old timer. The boy ain't tuh blame, and he wasn't fightin'. Nothin' like that! We was just havin' a sorter friendly wrastle, me havin' tricked him intuh it, tuh try out his muscle *and* his metal. Say, he's a bear; he's *game*, I'm tellin' yuh. Y' ought tuh be proud of him."

John Gray paid no attention whatsoever to the speaker's remarks. His expression had changed from amazement, through pain, to cold severity. "Mark," he said, "What is the meaning of this?"

"It is even as Mr. Bull . . . I mean 'Mr. Durham,' hath said, father. At least his explanation was true in part. But it was not he who tempted me to engage in contention, but rather Satan within my heart. I am sorry."

"Thou hast frequent cause to be sorry, and assuredly now. Look at thy face; thine apparel! I am thankful that thou hast not been quarreling in

anger, but art thou then still an unruly boy to be wasting thy time—and mine—and injuring thy clothing in a silly, nay, *wicked*, sport? I cannot understand thee!”

“Nor I understand myself, father. Verily, I have sinned in a grievous manner,” answered Mark, deeply penitent.

“Aw, hell! The boy ain’t no sinner—that’s plain tommyrot; beggin’ your pardon. He *couldn’t* do nothin’ else, I tell yuh; I pitched intuh him and he had tuh defend himself, didn’t he?” protested the wrestler.

“Nay, he did not! Thine interference is kindly meant, no doubt, but it is not needed or desired. Mark hath sinned, as he sayeth. Moreover, he is a wastrel.”

“If you’re worryin’ yourself sick over the time he took off, yuh can charge *that* on the bill, too,” the Bull growled.

“I shall do nothing of the sort. It shall be taken from his wages as a minor punishment; his own conscience will scourge him enough in addition, I doubt not, as thine own should thee; for thy conduct is as evil as it is inexplicable to me.”

“Don’t make me laff, my lip hurts,” answered the other, sarcastically, but he looked a little abashed. “Such a fuss over a little friendly wrastlin’ match! Can yuh beat it, Flash, I ask yuh?”

His satellite laughed loudly.

With lips sternly compressed, the smith set to

work on the broken shafts. Mark, after brushing the surface soil from his clothing and washing his face at the pump, returned to his own labors. Mr. Durham shrugged his herculean shoulders and went, sulkily, to resume his seat on the step of the machine, from which lowly rostrum he continued his remarks in a belligerently argumentative tone.

“‘Sinned.’ Huh! It’s a sin tuh keep the boy here in this dead hole, *I* say. A sinful waste of good material. He might be gettin’ double-leaded headlines on the sportin’ page, and makin’ more money in a week than *you* do in a year. Jest let a guy like me train him fer a few months, and add a few wrastlin’ tricks to his strength and speed, and he’d clean up. He’d be puttin’ *my* shoulders to the mat, two times outuh three, or I’m a liar.”

“*Yes* he would!” snorted Flash, who with all his faults was a staunch partisan.

“I’m tellin’ yuh,” the other responded, stubbornly, and he continued to aim further grumbling remarks at John Gray’s expansive back, while Flash continued to inhale the smoke of cheap Turkish cigarettes, and Mark to work, soberly and efficiently.

“There, it is finished, I think,” announced the young Quaker at length, as he swung a long leg over the side and slid into the driver’s seat. “It should bear thee to the city, at least, where it would be well for thee to have the motor thoroughly

overhauled, for it appeareth to have received no attention of late."

"'Of late?' Thunder, it never did. I don't know no more about machinery than the dago that the Irishman called down, when he was made boss of the construction gang fer a day. Know the story? He saw an Eyetalian pickin' up a wheelbarrow, and yelled at him, 'Hey, youse! Put thot barrer down. What the hell d'*you* know about machinery?' "

Mark felt a little twitching at the corners of his lips, but he sternly conquered it, the more readily because the smith had turned as though to launch a new rebuke at the story-teller. To cover it up, Mark started the engine and let it race with cut-out open. It roared, but unevenly, and he shook his head, saying, "I like not that sound. One of the cylinders is skipping, but it will go, I think. Dost thou mind if I ride with thee a little distance and further test it, although I doubt if there is anything more that I can do?"

"Mind? Gosh, no. Make it all the way tuh Philly, if yuh like. Oh, you ain't got no license tuh look worried," he hastily added, addressing the smith. "I ain't been able tuh persuade him tuh leave his happy home, and he's showed me that I couldn't force him to. Take a back seat, fer a change, Flash. We've got a new chuffer. Well, what's the bad news, brother? Remember I'm a poor man." He was again speaking to John



Gray, at the same time pulling from his trouser pocket a roll of bills so bulky that it made Mark gasp.

With the fewest possible words on the part of the smith the business end of the morning's affair was completed, and the wrestler climbed into the seat beside Mark.

"I am going but a little way, father, and I shall return in a few moments."

The youth meant it, then, implicitly. His conscience was scourging him bitterly, and he was sore at heart. For his soul's sake and to remove, if possible, some of his father's hurt and righteous indignation over his inexcusable behavior, he meant to labor as he never had before—and Mark was no shirker. Satan should not again find his hands or brain idle and ripe for mischief!

John Gray did not respond, but strode majestically into the shop.

"He might at least have answered," thought Mark, and a quick wave of irritation swept over him, for the moment covering up his distress. After all, what had he really done to make him an object of Dyer Dexter's scorn; his father's severe disapprobation? Truth was he *had* been badgered into the wrestling match, which was a trivial transgression at the most. And he had not hidden behind the Bull's generous assumption of all the blame; instead he had rather manfully acknowledged a

fault which scarcely existed. Mark began to feel himself abused.

With a jerk he engaged the clutch and simultaneously thrust the accelerator down with an impatient foot. The engine roared like an airplane's. The big car fairly leaped forward out of the yard, and was almost across the highway and into the fence again before he realized what was happening. He barely made the right-angle turn in time by pulling the steering wheel sharply over, and the machine skidded dangerously near the ditch. The sound of the abrupt departure and the wrestler's shout brought John Gray to the door of the smithy, and he shook his head, almost despairingly.

"Don't talk to *me!*" roared the Bull, as he settled back into his seat. "You're some speed hound yourself, I'll say. Go easy, kid. I want tuh get out of this joint without bein' lynched."

"I'm sorry," said Mark, as he brought the car down to fifteen miles an hour. "I did not know that she had such power."

"'Power'? Say, she can hit ninety. Try 'er out, if you like. The road's clear, and I was only foolin' about goin' slow."

"Nay, I shall not. Power is a dangerous thing and should be employed with caution, though I have no right to lecture thee," he finished, with a trace of bitterness.

"I'll say you haven't," laughed the Bull. "My arm's achin' me still, where yuh grabbed it, and

I ain't exactly soft. Anyhow, there ain't no sense in seein' how slow you can make her go," he added.

"Ninety miles an hour." As fast as the airplane he had read about and secretly yearned to try! How would it seem to go at such a pace, with the wind whistling past and the scenery a mere blur of green, the great machine eating up the white road more than a mile each minute? Mark's foot fairly itched to press hard down on the accelerating lever, and it was only by exercising the utmost in self-control that he kept the pace moderate. He succeeded. At a very Quakerlike rate of speed they passed between the clustered gray homes of the little village and down the road which ran like a ribbon insertion through the green velvet of the springtime fields. More and more isolated became the dwellings on either side. A mile; two miles were covered.

Then, "Thy motor runneth sufficiently well, I think," announced Mark. "So I must now leave thee, and return to my work."

His decision came at that particular point as a result of the fact that he had just at that instant caught sight of David, with Faith in swift pursuit, heading from their farm house towards the road.

"Leave us? Why, we're goin' right back past your place," the owner exclaimed.

"Nay, I thank thee, but I wish to walk and . . .

and think a little. I shall take a short cut, so that the distance is not far."

The car came to a stop, a few yards from the gate, just as the boy came to a stop against it and was clasped in the arms of the laughing Faith. David, his eyes still smarting from the home-made soap, struggled valiantly but in vain.

The Bull's laughter boomed out anew. "By the Lord 'Arry—as Half Nelson ustuh say—another Quaker wrastler in the makin'. Look at him squirm, though. Gosh, he's off again." The speaker slapped his mighty leg resoundingly and chuckled all over as David darted through the gate and headed towards them. Faith got as far as the road and stopped in confusion, rosily conscious of being under the close observation of Mark and two strangers while her arms were immodestly displayed and little tendrils of her hair, freed from its neat coiffure by her exertions, were blowing around her flushed cheeks and clinging to her moist forehead. Moreover she was holding her gray skirt well above her shapely, plain-stockinged ankles. She dropped it, hastily, and her eyes with it.

"Some skoit!" ejaculated the wrestler in unfeigned admiration. Mark looked with astonishment first at the garment which was apparently the object of the speaker's interest, then at the Bull himself. The real meaning contained within his metonymy dawned upon the Quaker, causing him to start and bring his hand down upon the wheel in



a smashing blow. The other started, in turn. He saw the black wrath-clouds appearing on Mark's brow and hastened to apologize with, "Figger of speech, son. No offense meant or taken, I hope, especially if the chic . . . the dame's—*'the girl's'* what I'm tryin' tuh say—is a friend of yours."

"She is," responded Mark, shortly, not altogether mollified.

"Bully fer you. You ought tuh move tuh the city and bring her along with yuh. It's a cryin' shame tuh waste a good-looker like that on the country, *I* say."

The sunshine of a little smile banished the last of the clouds from the lad's countenance. He laughed, merrily, and the wrestler roared forth an echo, without knowing exactly why. "Verily, men who dwell in the city have strange ideas!" exclaimed Mark. "I have been taught to believe that cities are like cesspools, or festering sores upon the land, yet thou seemeth to think that nowhere else should there be women that are fair or men that are . . . are strong. Hast thou then forgotten that the lilies, to which Solomon in all his glory was not to be compared, were of the fields, not of the towns?"

"Maybe you're right, kid. Guess I ought tuh know better, fer I was born on a farm, but the city kind of *gets* yuh, after a while. Perhaps I'd ought tuh amend my remarks and suggest that the city move out intuh the country," the Bull answered.

"Nay. Why spoil two places? And I fear that the two do not mix. Thy kind is not my kind. Our manner of living and of thought are as different, one from the other, as our speech—and thine, although thou callest it 'American,' I can scarce understand at all, at times. Thou hast been incidental in causing me some pain this morning . . . "

"Gee, I'm sorry if I hurt yuh, kid," interrupted the wrestler, but Mark smiled and went on, " . . . Nay, not bodily pain—thou hast misunderstood me. But I bear thee no ill will. Indeed, I like thee, Friend. I know not why I should, but I do, of a verity."

"Good! That's the talk. That makes it two of a kind, fer I'm strong fer you, boy. Put 'er there!"

The late antagonists clasped hands heartily and the magnetic force of true friendliness flowed from one to the other at the contact. Mark faced around in his seat and offered his hand to Flash as well, but the other was busy lighting a fresh cigarette and feigned not to see him, and he turned back, a hurt expression on his face.

"If thou thinkest of me, at all, please do not think too ill of me because of my harsh criticisms, Friend. I am afraid that I am young, and lack breadth of understanding," Mark said, apologetically.

"Aw, ferget it! You're all right—nothin' the matter with *you*, kid. 'Course you're young, but

Time'll cure that, as the poet said. And who wouldn't be kinder narrow, livin' in a place like this, I ask you?"

"It is my home. My ancestors have all lived here for generations. I was bred and born here—and I love it."

"Sure yuh do! It's a peach of a place, and if I ever get done up and need a place tuh rest in I'm comin' back, see? A guy ought tuh be able tuh spend a nice quiet month in about a couple of days, here. Take that from one who lives in a town that the rest of the country calls 'The City of the Dead.' Now, don't get sore. I'm jest jokin'. If you ever get tuh Philly, look us up, and me and Flash'll show yuh the town. Here's my engraved visitin' card. You'll find it an 'open sesame' at the Central A. A., which is where I generally hang out. Better let me drive yuh back home, kid."

"Nay. I thank thee, but I shall leave thee here," Mark responded.

"He's leavin' us here. D'yuh get that, Flash? *Shashay la femme*, as the frogs say—which, as I understand it, means 'Hunt fer the dame in the case.' In this case we ain't got far tuh *shash*, I'm thinkin'. Give her my love."

"Nay. That I shall surely not do." The youth froze up again.

"Oh, that's jest another figger of speech. I didn't mean nothin' by it. Well, so long. See yuh

in church sometime. That's another, and means no more than the first."

Mark smiled as he dismounted from the car. Verily his new acquaintance was beyond his comprehension—a denizen of a wholly different world. Flash's thin legs straddled over into the seat which Mark had quitted and he slumped down, saying, "Come on, Bull. Step on the gas."

Mr. Durham sighed, and complied. The car shot forward down the road, leaving Mark Gray in Content but with a little ache bred of discontent in his heart.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A NEW IMPULSE

FAITH and David had both retreated behind the semi-concealment of the paling fence on observing the car. Now that it had turned and sped away in a cloud of dust, the boy sprang through the gateway again and flung both arms about Mark's waist. His sister took one step forward, and stood with her arm resting on the gate post, her eyes cast modestly down, while the flooding color which her recent exercise had imparted to her cheeks was still further augmented.

"I bid thee good-morning, Friend Mark," she said, in a gentle voice.

"And I, thee, Sister Faith." He, too, lowered his eager eyes, directing his gaze at the top of David's rumpled head, and hurried on, "Why dost thou try to hide behind me, David? Dost thou think that I would be thine accomplice and aid thee to escape a needed scrubbing? Nay."

"Yea. Thou dost always side with sister Faith, Mark. 'Mine enemies encompass me about,' " the boy replied, in so doleful a voice that the other two could not help but laugh.

"On the contrary, we are thy friends, son. Hast

thou forgotten that 'cleanliness is next to godliness?' "

"Then *thou* art not very godly, this morning. For thou hast a big smutch on thy cheek," retorted the lad, saucily. And he indicated it with his finger.

Mark grew suddenly very red and relinquished his grasp on David to attack the tell-tale mark, vigorously. He felt as though he were branded, like Cain.

"I do not know what hath gotten into David, this morning. He hath been naughty from the time he got up," Faith exclaimed, with distress in her tone. The object of her remark attempted to dart away, only to be overtaken by a lunge of Mark's long arm, and lifted into the air as Flash had been. "Thou shouldst apologize to Friend Mark for thy rudeness, David. The stains of labor are honorable, and not like the soil acquired while wasting one's time in mischief—as thine was."

Her words, kindly meant, fell like a lash on the quick of Mark's conscience, and to cover his confusion he strode hastily towards the house, bearing the boy in his arms. On the porch, he held him almost grimly, and lent his aid in the process of making *him*, at least, wholly clean. David squirmed in vain and sputtered, "I hate water—except to swim in. Jeremiah saith that it is bad for one; it rusts the stomach just as it doth iron. And I think that it maketh my freckles."

"Nonsense! Thy sister Faith hath none, and I'll wager . . . I mean, I am sure, that she washeth ten times to thy once," answered Mark.

"Well, she scrubs 'em off, I guess. Thou shouldst see her . . . "

"That will do, David," interrupted Faith hastily. Full well she knew what embarrassing disclosures concerning the intimate family life a child often makes in all innocence. But she laughed a little, nevertheless. It was spring and the springtime of life was also glowing within her heart. And Mark was by her side. Their hands were immersed in the same basin of soapy water. They had just come in contact and, for just an instant, the fingers had intertwined. Mark laughed, too, and secretly prayed that the girl had been conscious of the same sort of thrill which had set his nerves to tingling pleasantly, and his heart to beating fast.

At length David was clean enough to pass even his sister's critical inspection of neck and ears. He was released, almost burnished.

"Now run and harness the Prophet, dear," she commanded. The old family horse had been given the name because of his seeming infallible ability to foretell the coming of a tempest. "Friend Jeremiah hath loaded the truck wagon—at least, I suppose that he hath. Hope shall run and see."

"I will go if Mark wilt come and help me. Perhaps he wilt ride back to the village with us." The boy's face was beaming now. The ordeal was

ended and he harbored no further resentment, but was winding himself about the legs of his erstwhile persecuter.

"Nay. I shall walk 'cross lots," answered the man, quickly. It would never, never do for him to be seen riding with Faith! "Thou hast no need of my help, Davie. Run along, as thy sister hath bidden thee. See, little Hope hath already gone."

"Aw, thou art always telling me to 'run along,' it seemeth to me—thou and Friend Dyer Dexter, when he cometh over to see sister Faith." The boy departed, scarcely at a run, his bare feet rebelliously kicking up the dust.

"Friend Dyer Dexter seemeth to come here frequently."

"Mark, I do not like to hear thee speak in that manner," responded Faith.

He assumed a look of injured innocence. "I said nothing. I merely stated a fact which David . . ."

"The tone of voice often saith more than the words, Mark. Friend Dyer is our next neighbor. If he cometh here, occasionally, is it strange? Especially as we are situated, with no older person save the irresponsible Jeremiah to assist and . . . and advise us?"

"Nay, it is only natural and proper, I suppose, but . . ." The single word 'but' can also express more than a full sentence. "I have no right to criticize him, I suppose, even if . . . But I sus-



pect that thou wilt very soon hear a severe criticism of me from *his* lips, Faith—and in part a just one. I . . . I came out here partly for the purpose of telling thee about it; not that I mean to excuse my conduct, which hath been inexcusable I fear.”

“Oh, Mark! What hast thou been doing—*now?*” Faith clasped her hands together and her lips trembled a little.

In a voice which was low and hesitating through distress, yet at times not without a hint of amusement as he recalled the events, the man frankly recounted all that had occurred that morning, extenuating nothing. He prefaced his story with the sentence, “The soil upon my cheek was not that of honorable work, Faith.”

As he talked, the girl—without conscious volition—walked from the porch to a little bench beneath an elm. Her gesture was an invitation for Mark to do likewise, but he was too filled with nervous energy to remain seated. Under the spur of memory, awakened by his recital, his breathing quickened and his nerves and muscles would not be still. Once Faith interrupted him, to say, “Come, sit thee beside me, and try to compose thyself, Mark. Thou art needlessly excited. It is all over, now.”

“Verily, I cannot be quiet—especially this morning. I cannot explain it, but there is something within me, some strange power, which seemeth to

be driving me constantly. I must be *doing* something," he responded.

"What . . . what is it, Mark?"

"Nay, I do not know. How many times have I asked myself the same question and found no reasonable answer to it? Perhaps it is as Sister Patience sayeth, and I was born with the spirit of unrest, which seemeth to be abroad in all the world, within me. Though I know not why I should have been, for mother they say, was gentle and sweet and father is a man devoid of nerves, I truly believe."

Mark completed his confession, stopped, and the girl exclaimed, "Nay. Thou wert not so *very* much to blame, I am sure. At least I understand. Circumstances do alter cases, and I know what I shall answer if Friend . . . if any one repeats the story to me, as gossip defaming thee."

In her earnestness her color mounted and her voice rang out bravely. Mark had gone around behind her in his nervous pacing, and now he looked directly down upon her hair, enticingly disarranged, the white curves of her neck which so quickly lost themselves within the scarcely whiter kerchief, the rich tinting of one cheek which was partially turned towards him, and the quickened rise and fall of her young bosom. He had been stirred with a real remorse. His heart strings had been plucked and were vibrant with an emotion which could easily be translated into love. And she was now declaring herself his champion!

Faith almost felt the intensity of his gaze; at least she sensed the magnetic change within him and turned her head with the startled movement of a deer which has somehow become aware of the unseen hunter's presence. She would have risen; but, swifter than she, Mark bent down impulsively, took her head firmly but with utter tenderness between his two big hands, bent it back to him and kissed her, full upon the slightly parted lips, once; twice. Then the girl broke away and sprang to her feet, facing him. On her countenance was a new look, born of pain, anger, or love. Perhaps of all three.

“Mark Gray! How didst thou *dare*?”

Faith did not wait to hear the answer to her demand. Before he could speak so much as the first word of entreaty or apology, she had turned about and run like a frightened thing back to the porch and into the house.

Mark was taken by surprise but he hesitated only a second. Her swift-taking flight redoubled his desire. He had tasted of a wine more potent than any pressed from the grape, and then the cup had been snatched from his lips, tantalizingly. Vaulting over the impending bench, he gave chase and reached the closed door just in time to hear its bolt shot into place. For a moment he pressed all his weight against locked portal, twisting the knob and calling her name. His very being was crying aloud. Well for Faith that she had been so quick, if her

heart were not ready to hear the answer to her question which she had asked!

The hot impulse passed from Mark, and left him shaken and ashamed, bitterly ashamed. His hands clenched; he bowed his head against the panel of the door, and gasped, half audibly, "O God, Thou knowest that I love her, love her! But why didst Thou allow me to frighten her as I have done? Love is not a sin, but passion is, and she must think . . . Nay, she cannot think *that* of me. Make her to understand, O Lord!" He groaned in the new anguish of his heart. "Verily an evil spirit possesseth me that I should act thus. Or else I am merely a fool. Grant me wisdom; strength to conquer these my mad impulses, I pray thee."

And Faith?

She had stopped on the inner side of the barred door and turned, trembling, suddenly weak of limb. All the physical strength seemed to have been drained from her body. She, too, leaned against the other side of the thin panel, with her flushed forehead pressed hard against the wood and her hands covering her hot cheeks, although none was there to see. Almost like an echo to his cry, she murmured, "O Lord, why didst Thou let him do that? It was so wrong, wicked! And, Lord, help me to believe that he meant no evil, for . . . for I want to believe it."

Never had she experienced the feelings which



now swept over her in recurrent waves, each leaving her more shaken than its predecessor. Nor could she analyze them; they were made up of so many component parts of sweet pain and happiness filled with bitter misgivings. She had been kissed—by Mark! And she knew in her innermost heart that the first time her lips had not repelled his. Shame; and trembling delight!

The man remained as he was for a moment longer, too agitated to move. Then he slowly turned away, just as David approached down the drive, slapping the reins over the Prophet's broad back. Little Hope was beside him on the high seat.

"Thith ith our chariot, Mark," she piped. "We are going to rathe all the way to the village and will take thee with uth."

"Nay, I have raced too much this morning, already," answered the man. "I shall walk slowly, and still beat thee thither, I think; for thy sister Faith will scarcely wish to start while I am in sight," he added, bitterly.

"Why not? She loveth thee!" announced the boy.

"What?" Mark's heart leaped at the words.

"Sure she doth! I told her that she did, this morning, and she said . . ."

"Yea. What did she say?"

"She said, 'Surely I *like* him.' And then I reminded her that thou wert a neighbor and that the

Bible saith, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' So you see that she must."

Mark's face fell. "Oh!" he responded, and turned sharply away.

When he reached the gate he turned back for one more look at the door. It was still forbiddingly closed. A symbol? "Oh, what a fool I have been—what a fool I am everlastingly being!" he thought. "Was there ever in the world another man who acted as I act, eternally rushing up to the heights and then falling abruptly into the depths of regret?"

As usual his appearance reflected his thoughts, and he started slowly down the side of the road with head bowed, hands clasped, and shoulders drooping.

Behind the door Faith had heard the brief colloquy with new emotions. She knew that Mark had taken his departure, and from the tone in which his "Oh!" had been uttered she guessed his feelings. How could David have said what he did? He was old enough to know better than to have made such a statement, and he ought to be punished for it. But why should she correct him if he were telling the truth? Or was he? After all it would be better to pretend that she had not heard. She opened the door and stepped onto the porch just in time to see the man whom she now knew to be her confessed lover—for actions, like intonations, often speak louder than words—as he was

passing out of sight. He appeared so wretchedly distressed that the last spark of resentment died within her, and her heart cried out to him as a mother's toward the child whom she has had to punish. She might even now call him back.

"Drive along, David. I will walk and open the gate for thee," she said. Faith hurried a little, although still undecided. She reached the end of the drive and glanced down the road just in time to see an astounding transformation take place in Mark. His shoulders straightened; his head was thrown back with face lifted to the skies as though in exultation; his long arms were flung up and out with a gesture of abandon that was almost pagan. Faith started in amazement. What had happened?

What, indeed!

Mark was soaring again, borne upward on the wings of memory, stirred to life by the recollection of David's statement. "Out of the mouth of babes!" Perhaps it were true. Faith might love him; at any rate, he meant that she should. And he had kissed her! What if she had fled from him, her Quaker soul in shocked rebellion against his unseemly act, when no word of affection had ever been spoken between them? *He had done it*, and memory brought freshly back the sensation of that brief moment when her sweet breath had been on his face, and her warm lips on his. She, too, seemed to

have answered the call of nature at springtide, the mating season. And what, after all, was there wrong in it? Why should he allow that act to be a cause of shame and remorse for him, Nay, he meant to do it again—and again. Exultation, in truth! There was a bird singing, overhead; he must sing, too. It mattered not what he sang, and for a moment he was entirely unconscious of the melody and words which burst from his lips. “O, by gee, by gosh, by gum, by Jove.”

Suddenly he stopped, cold all over, as he realized that he was chanting the profane, ribald—or so it seemed to him—song which the city youth had sung at the smithy. Perhaps David and little Hope had heard him! He spun around on his heel. The Prophet was just appearing through the gateway; but infinitely worse than that, Faith was herself standing by the roadside, her lips parted, eyes wide with amazement and hands pressed against her breast.

Every atom of strength seemed to ooze from Mark; he turned hot and icy cold by turns. Faith had heard. He took one uncertain backward step, struck his heel against the protruding root of a tree and fell flat! That was the final straw. Mark's ignominy was complete. He wished that the ground on which he had fallen might open and swallow him up, or that he might turn into the worm which he felt like, and hide from the sight of men within it. He sprang to his feet to see



Faith starting towards him, her countenance now filled with pain and pity. He fled.

“There, sister Faith,” exclaimed David. “Thou seest that Friend Mark *doth* say the words I told thee he did—those that are akin to profanity.”

## CHAPTER IX

### COINCIDENCES

"SAY, Flash, ain't that Bob—Bob Means? Old Bob Means?" The Bull asked the question and answered it himself. "Sure it is."

"Uh-huh. Wonder when he got back, and why. I haven't heard that gay Paree has gone dry, yet. Who's that with him?"

"Dunno. Hey, Bob! How's the boy; how's every little thing?"

Durham, who never did anything by halves, stopped the machine with a jerk which almost precipitated Flash through the windshield. The car slewed to the curbing, just missing the man whom he had hailed, and who now turned on them with a scowl. When he recognized his accoster he smiled, and put out a slender hand encased in a pale chamois glove to meet the Bull's welcoming grasp.

Robert Means was as patently a product of one type as the wrestler was of another, and Flash of a third; yet they were all akin in one respect, although for different reasons. The squared circle or the wrestling mat threw over them all, alike, the spell which binds together the brotherhood of sport-

ing men. With the latter two it was a matter of vocation; with the former, one of avocation, however, as any one could have told at a glance.

Means's attire was ultra-fashionable and as sporty as that of the "gambler-manager," although of quite a different type. A pearl gray Fedora Parisian morning suit, spats, and bamboo cane lent him an air of distinction, and his face offered no jarring note. It was obviously patrician, and a multitude of chorus girls, to whom it was not altogether unfamiliar, declared that it was not only the beau ideal of manly beauty but had "class." It *was* classic; cast in Grecian mold, with high forehead, slender, somewhat aquiline nose, well-shaped mouth, and firm chin. His dark mustache was—after the fashion of the day—clipped so close that it was scarcely more than a sharply-defined shadow on his short upper lip. And he was well-proportioned and naturally athletic, although his muscles were soft from lack of real exercise. So far good enough, but his gray eyes were cold and lack-luster, and the flesh beneath them already held a hint of future flabby pouches, while lines, graven by excesses, imparted to the corners of his mouth a downward curve more petulant than severe. Too much wealth for which he had not had to work, too much unemployed time, too much of those things of life which should be sparingly used, or better avoided altogether, had left their stamp upon

his face, despite the fact that he was only in the middle thirties.

A countenance is an open book whereon the moving hand of Time ineffaceably records the marks of character for the physiognomist to read. The process is infinitely slow, but it is as sure as Time itself, like the minute formal changes in a coral reef by the accretions of multitudinous polyps too tiny to be seen alone.

Means, with his inherited wealth and the profligate tendencies which it bred, was precisely the type of man which the melodramists of our grandsires' time portrayed as the inevitable city villain of the piece, painting his vices in blackest hues. But he was in reality no more the out-and-out knave than was Friend Dyer Dexter, and he would have been fully as incensed as such a characterization. "I'm not a bad sort of chap, although I make no pretense to being a saint—heaven forbid!" he might have said.

And such was the fact, judged by the standards of his kind.

We, in our greater wisdom and influenced by modern tolerance, know well enough that the rich city man is by no means necessarily a villain, nor yet is the simple country girl always sweet and pure; although it is only fair to admit that the contrasting environments in which the two dwell offer greater opportunities for the one to be bad and the other to be good—if only negatively so. Thus



in the case of Robert Vandervetter Means, scion of an ancient and aristocratic Philadelphia family. He had always had the opportunity for free indulgence in the vices which present themselves to men of his station, and it was hardly strange that he had not always turned a deaf ear to their appeal. For, in the cities at least, they come not hideous of aspect, but rather attractively arrayed, and either have the tacit approval of society or are politely ignored. It is this fact which makes the influence of city life so insidious, so hard to armor oneself against, so weakening to the moral fiber. A fight, even if it be temporarily lost, is strengthening: easy surrender makes the next surrender more easy.

So much for the past of Mr. Robert Means. He now greeted the wrestler cordially, Flash with more reserve, and then introduced his companion, in an off-hand manner, as "Mr. Hibbard." He was an exemplar of still a fourth type; the young, energetic, clean-living and thinking American of good blood and hard-earned education, with a real job to give him a purpose in life and keep him from the manifold temptations which lie in wait for the idler.

"What yuh been doin', all these months?" demanded the Bull, addressing Means.

"Globe-trotting, in theory—which means wasting my time and substance in riotous living in Paris. Got dead sick of it and came home."

"Sure yuh did. It don't get yuh nothin'. I

done it, once—went as far as Boston and loafed a week. It don't get yuh nothin'."

"Still the same old philosophical pugilist," smiled Means, tolerantly. "I'll have to come around and let you jolly me a bit, Bull. I'm out of sorts, these days."

"Prob'ly your liver's outer order; too much raw fusil oil at ten dollars a quart, since yuh got home. Prohibition's a good thing, in theory, but prohibition that don't prohibit is what Sherman said war was. Yuh see I've cut out cussin'? And thereby hangs a tale, as the poet said."

"Tell it to me, sometime," answered Means, glancing significantly at his watch.

"Sure I will. Tell yuh a good one on Flash, here, too. Come around tuh my training place almost anytime and I'll put yuh through a course of sprouts that'll take the bile outer your system, although prob'ly what yuh need most is to beat it away and rustycate somewhere fer a while, and dilute the stuff that's in your blood with some water—know what that is?"

"Rather. I just sailed across three thousand miles of the stuff—that's plenty."

"I'll say so!" interpolated Flash.

"I ain't jokin'. That, and some real fresh air instead of cigarette smoke in your lungs is what yuh need, even though yuh smoke tobacker instead of the dope that Flash, here, inhales. Yes, sir. You'd ought tuh get out in the country, and rusty-

cate fer a while—lead the simple life, at some place like . . .” The Bull paused, and an amused twinkle crept into his little eyes. He suddenly slapped his thigh, resoundingly, and burst into a loud guffaw.

“I know jest the place fer yuh—don’t we, Flash? A country village about fifty or sixty miles from an electric light. Fine air, water—Flash’ll tell yuh the same—scenery; especially scenery. We saw some, jest as we was leavin’. Nothin’ to do ’til to-morrow, all day long, except inhale ozone and watch the chickens. . . .”

“‘Chickens,’ is right,” broke in Flash with a significant wink.

“Now, you begin to interest me strangely.” Mr. Means smiled. “Where is your garden of Eden?”

“On the main road. . . . Couple of hours’ run out in a car. It’s a sort of a ‘Forty-five Minutes from Broadway’ place, only more so, a whole lot more so. Nothing but Quakers and Quakeresses there, sayin’ ‘thee and thou’ and ‘yea and nay.’ It’s a scream tuh hear ’em.”

“More and more enticing, after Paris. What’s its name?”

“Dam . . . pardon me, *danged* if I know. Let’s see, though. There was a sign. It’s got a sort of a Pollyanna-like moniker . . . dang it all, I ferget, but I could find my way there again, if I should ever decide to go; and I may, at that.”

"Same here, and many of 'em," added Flash, promptly. "I like the bright lights, but if a certain pair of bright eyes would shine for me, I'd almost be content. . . ."

"That's it. You've said it!" The Bull's tone was eager. "'Content' is the name; I knew it all the time."

"'Content?'" Mr. Hibbard now broke into the conversation. "That's an odd coincidence, Bob. There can't very well be more than one village by that name in the state, and it's where I'm going next week to continue a survey for a new branch of the B. & O. Besides, I've heard that its inhabitants were Friends, and I've been rather looking forward to seeing what their life really is like."

"You'll get an eyeful, all right. Funny guys, but some of 'em are almost human, and one's a real he-man. Ask Flash, he knows. Eh, Flash?"

His satellite scowled.

"Good. What's his name? Perhaps I'll be able to get acquainted with him."

"Goes by the name of Mark something. But he ain't no easy one, I'm tellin' yuh. He's one big boy, and a game guy, too. Works in his dad's blacksmith shop and knows more about motors than most city garredge men, I'll say. Mighty good man to have as a friend, and a bad one tuh run afoul of, fer he's the original fightin' Quaker—a prayin' son of a gun, that packs a wollop in each fist. I know. Wanted tuh cure me of cussin', and actu-



ally make Flash cut out cigarette smokin' fer 'most two minutes. If I was the doctor I'd send yuh out there, Bob, and give this Mark boy orders to attend tuh your case."

"Better take your friend's advice, Bob. He has hit the nail on the head. You need fresh air and water; but most of all a fresh point of view. And what could be a better cure for discontent than Content itself? Come along with me. I like company, and I was planning to rough it and make the trip a semi-vacation anyway; pitch a tent in some sylvan grove, and get most of my own grub. That's got Paris beaten a mile, in my estimation—but of course I was only over there during the late unpleasantness." Hibbard was a persuasive arguer and Means' weary eyes lighted up a little with the reflection of a long-lost boyish enthusiasm. He smiled.

"A truly brilliant suggestion! The Bull is disinterested and ingenuous in his advice, but methinks that thou hast an eye to the main chance, and are looking for a goat to wash dishes and supply a car to lug your luggage in. Am I right?"

Hibbard laughed in turn, frankly. "'You're blanked right, you're right!' 'A truly brilliant suggestion'—to quote yourself. I had thought of the dish-washing, but not of the car, and I accept your generous offer in the spirit in which it was made."

"Only it hasn't been made, yet."

"Better' make it then, Bob," interpolated the

wrestler. "The air will do yuh good, and the natives will do yuh the same, if yuh don't watch out, as the poet says. The French have the ability in seperatin' yuh from your hard-earned coin, I'm told, but the Friends ain't tuh be sneezed at in that respect. Think it over. Well, we've got to be movin'. So long, Bob. Glad to have met yuh, Mr. Hibbard. Better persuade him tuh go along; but if he does, keep an eye on him. There's a 'chicken' there, all right, but the young blacksmith has got her spoke for, or I miss my guess, and he's a bad man tuh cross."

"Aw, cut out the chatter and step on the gas," remarked Flash in a husky undertone. The driver obeyed, and so passes out of the chronicle—for a time.

Coincidence? Assuredly. But all history is composed of apparent coincidences and through their agency the course of countless human lives, as well as world events, is often completely altered.

## CHAPTER X

### ON THE FIRST DAY

THE Sabbath in Content—the “First Day.”

Of course it was merely an illusion, but it seemed that nature, itself, was more tranquil and lovely on that day of rest. At least, so it appeared to Mark Gray. Bees, dusted golden with pollen, buzzed over the pink-tipped clover tops with a drowsier hum; the bird notes were tuned to a more harmonious key. The songful silence of nature overflowed the village from the near-by fields. Overhead, the sky spread a canopy of blue, unblemished save for one cream cloud no larger than a man's hand above the eastern horizon hills.

To the youth the Sabbath was always a day fraught with a mixture of feelings. Its utter peace at once attracted and maddened him, for, although it sometimes helped him to calm his violent bursts of impulse, labor was forbidden and even this single outlet for his surcharged energies and youthful exuberance of spirits was closed to him. The Friends paid to the Biblical injunction, “on it thou shalt do no manner of work; neither thou, nor thy man-servant nor thy maid-servant, thine ox nor thine

ass, nor the stranger that is within thy gates" as nearly letter-perfect obedience as is humanly possible. It was for them indeed a day of rest and solemn meditation, in the Meeting House and in their own homes, whose front window shutters were tightly closed. But to Mark it brought moments when he felt as a man in a straight-jacket and padded cell must feel. He wanted to shriek aloud.

At such times he often found some relief for his pent-up emotions by passing through the portal of imagination into the wonderful country of "Make Believe," whither few grown-up members of his sect could possibly have followed him, even had they so desired. Once arrived there, Mark was the hero of many a stirring adventure which set his nerves to vibrating and heart to pounding as strongly as though his action had been physical. Romance of this sort wickedly filled many a long period of silence, supposed to be devoted to prayer, while the entire population of Content were gathered together in the severely simple Meeting House and waiting for the Spirit to move one of their number to speak aloud.

During these silent periods he found some manner of relief in another way, as well. As at no other time he could watch Faith's sweet face—covertly, to be sure, but almost continually—as she sat with the other women across from him, her hands folded in her lap, her head devoutly bent. Occasionally her own luminous eyes would be lifted



to his, as though magnetically attracted. And, more occasionally still, he would think that he read a message in them, one that he hardly dared to translate for fear that he might be wrongly ascribing to it the meaning that he wished to find. But this was all in the past.

### The First Day morning in Content!

The time for meeting was almost at hand, and somber-clad Quaker families were walking soberly towards the gray Meeting House at the Corners; sedate men, gentle women, prim children, all silent save for an occasional low voiced greeting. Some, who lived at more considerable distances, were riding thither in plain wagons drawn by unhurried work horses, the very gait of which seemed to reflect the spirit of the day. Friend Dyer Dexter came thus, with his brood of younger children, all pale and prim with little backs very erect and little hands precisely folded.

"Poor youngsters," thought Mark. "They do need a mother's love and care. But God grant that it be another than Faith. I should verily carry her bodily away before I would yield her to him." Friend Dyer passed by, with averted head; but Mark did not mind, for he was at that moment mentally snatching the girl he loved from the clutches of his rival, and bearing her away out into the wide, wide world in the Bull's motor car at ninety miles an hour. Yet while he was so engaged,

as he walked slowly onward with John Gray and Sister Patience, head bent and hand clasped about his Bible, his ears were strained for a certain well-known *click-clack* made only by the Prophet's hoofs on the hard highway.

For the tenth time he glanced up and behind him, to disappointment, and then permitted his gaze to wander over the fields which stretched from the roadside to the horizon hills, velvety in their spring verdure. A gentle breeze played fitfully over them, ruffling the grass in moving swathes. It looked so inviting that Mark felt a mad desire to break from the slow procession, cast his body down upon that grass, and roll over and over. He smiled a little at the succeeding thought of what consternation such an action on his part would occasion. Then his heart-beat quickened into unison with new hoof-beats. He looked expectantly back towards Smilie's Corner. This time he was not disappointed. The old Prophet was plodding into view. Now he could see Jeremiah, a very yellow straw hat perched on his ill-fitting wig; behind him, on the rear seat of the family carry-all were Faith, David and Hope.

"Mark!"

John Gray's quiet voice recalled him to the present, and the realization that he had stopped short. He flushed and stepped forward, only to halt again as the Sabbath stillness was outraged by a raucous blast from a siren horn. Simultaneously a big touring car turned the corner, almost on two wheels.

Mark spun round. His mind visualized in a flash the former accident which had so aroused him, picturing Faith as its victim, for conditions were almost identical, except that this time the automobile was coming around the corner behind the wagon. His heart seemed to leap into his throat; and with reason. For his mind picture and the scene which his eyes were beholding had merged into one.

True, the roaring mechanical monster had passed the other vehicle, clearing it by a hair's breadth; but the Prophet—startled just as old Ned had been—had broken into a frightened, lumbering gallop with the wagon swaying and jolting behind him. He heard an oath from Jeremiah; a cry of childish terror from little Hope.

Mark leaped into the roadway, barely escaping collision with a mass of out-jutting paraphernalia which filled the tonneau of the speeding car. The plunging horse was almost upon him, but his quickened faculties had time to register a picture of Jeremiah standing up and sawing on the reins. His old hat and wig had fallen off and his almost bare head shone in the spring sunlight. Then the young man made a forward lunge. His hand, the muscles of which had been tempered almost to steel by work at the forge, seized the near rein close to the bit. The horse shied and reared, jerking his captor from his feet. Mark felt a wrench at his shoulder muscles. He caught a glimpse of a big hoof, which he had himself helped to shoe a week



before, close to his eyes. He shut them, but hung on, desperately.

Came a crash against his bent head; a shower of shooting stars enveloped him; blackness.

He returned to a realization of time and place a moment later, and discovered that his head, which felt tremendously big and filled with every kind of pain, was pillowed on some one's lap. With an effort he managed to open his eyes for an instant. They closed again, but not before he had, through a misty haze, seen Faith's countenance close above his own. It had appeared oddly distressed, as though it were she who were in pain. Certainly there had been tears upon her cheeks and trembling on her eye-lids.

"Oh, is he dead, is he dead?" Mark knew that the questioning voice was Faith's, although the loud ringing in his ears almost drowned it out. The demand irritated him, somehow. Of course he was not dead. If he were he could not hear her speak! He tried to answer, but only a groan passed his lips.

"Didst thou hear? He's alive! Oh, thank God, thank God! Mark, dear Mark, canst thou hear me? Art thou badly hurt?"

He shook his head a little. Already the weakness and nausea were passing away, for he was young and strong. The darting pains were lessening, too, but he felt listless and as though he would like to lie there, indefinitely; although he vaguely realized



that "there" must be the middle of the road. He had been hit by an automobile, or something, had he not? The middle of the road! Then Faith must be sitting in it, for she was certainly holding his head on her lap. There was something wrong about that. She shouldn't be there, especially on the Sabbath! He must get up, even though he was strangely dizzy. By means of another anguishing effort he thrust himself into a sitting position, and opened his eyes again.

There was a crowd of neighbors about him; his father, Sister Patience, all looking both frightened and relieved. Just beyond them appeared the bald head of Jeremiah Jones, and he was holding the head of the Prophet. Mark suddenly remembered.

"I . . . I am not hurt," he announced, as he got unsteadily to his feet, aided and steadied by his father's hand. He would have bent to assist Faith to arise, but some one was before him—Friend Dyer Dexter. Mark felt angry. Had *he* not earned the right to aid her?

"Verily, that was a close call, my boy," said his father in a husky voice. "God spared thy life then."

It was utterly foolish, he knew, but all he could think of was a saying he had once heard, "if a man is born to be hanged, he'll never be drowned," and he caught himself wondering if the same applied to one kicked by a horse. Others were speaking, all together, in a jumble of words. It was all still rather uncertain, but they seemed to be commending him,

saying that his quickness and courage prevented an accident, perhaps saved Faith's life; that he had been heroic. It came as a shock to Mark, this realization that—for the first time in his existence—he was regarded with esteem by his neighbors. It helped still further to clear his brain and restore his strength. He consciously stood erect and said, " 'Twas nothing."

Faith stepped forward and laid her hand on his dusty sleeve. "Nothing? How canst thou say that, Ma . . . Friend Mark? Thy courage saved . . . saved us all from possible injury. We thank thee from our hearts—and are proud of thee." As she pronounced the last five words, her head went up with a visible challenge and she glanced for an instant directly at Friend Dyer Dexter.

"Yea, yea," murmured several others. Mark awkwardly patted her hand and she withdrew it, coloring deeply.

There was an interruption. John Gray was pointing down the road, and saying, "The automobile is turning about; it is coming back. Friends, its driver was criminally careless, but perhaps he hath repented. Let us not forget ourselves and display unseemly spleen." He spoke to all, yet it was obvious that he was uttering a warning alike to Mark and himself, for his face was dark with the shadow of suppressed wrath. "Verily those of the city have no regard for the Sabbath."

"Nor for life, limb, or property," added Dexter,

hotly. "We should seek some way to put an end to the menace of their motor cars. Of a truth, Content is no longer what it used to be."

The car was approaching them now. Gray glanced at Mark and read on his countenance what was occurring within his heart, for hot indignation was welling up again and clamoring for drastic action. For once he sided with Friend Dyer, and ached to begin the extermination of reckless car owners on the spot.

"I will aid thee home, my boy," said Gray, as he took Mark gently but firmly by the arm. "Come; it is best that thou goeth at once."

"Nay. . . ."

"Yea. I understand thy feelings, but thou canst do no good and might do much harm by remaining. Besides thou hast not noticed, but thine apparel . . ."

Mark's eyes followed his father's gaze downward and every other thought was blotted out instantly, for he saw that the back of one of his trouser legs was ripped wide open, and the tear extended far upward. Hot with embarrassment and mortification, he seized the two loose ends with his hand and started off, saying, "Nay, I will go alone, father. I was not hurt, save for an instant."

He broke into an unsteady run, pursued by a shout of derisive laughter. Looking back over his shoulder, Mark caught sight of him who dared to laugh—the driver of the speeding car, a handsome but

dissipated young man with a close-clipped mustache—and a bitter hatred of him was born in his heart. He almost stopped, to return and put his punitive desire into execution, but modesty drove him on towards home at a redoubled pace. Passion had made him forget the pain in his head and every thought of weakness. He scarcely saw the gate to the front walk, but the three-foot paling fence loomed in his path and over the top of it he went without breaking his stride.

There was a little gasp from some of the watching Friends, and a low whistle from the driver of the car.



## CHAPTER XI

### QUAKER MEETING

MR. ROBERT VANDERVETTER MEANS stopped his machine on the outskirts of the unfriendly cluster of Friends, stepped out of it and, golf cap in hand, approached Faith, who had just climbed into the carry-all again. To do him justice, he had not seen Mark's accident and might not have known that anything had gone wrong if he had not observed the excitement displayed by a family in front of him. It was still further to his credit that he so promptly returned in the face of the obvious hostility, to find out whether or not he had been the cause of any damage.

Now he stepped deliberately in front of Friend Dyer Dexter, and addressed the girl in a tone which was both respectful and apologetic. "I am extremely sorry if I was the cause of what seems to have been a near-runaway, Miss. I did not know . . ."

"They never do, and they're never going more than fifteen miles an hour," interpolated Dexter, harshly. "Young man thou art one of an accursed. . . ."

"I do not recall having addressed *you*. I cer-

tainly have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, and have no desire to make it, sir." Means' voice was suavely cutting, and even the stern old man was momentarily silenced and abashed.

"Permit me to offer my sincere apologies," continued Means, turning back to Faith. "If any damage has been occasioned I will gladly pay. . . ."

"Nay, there has been none—at least, not to . . . to us. Verily there might have been, however, had it not been for the bravery of . . . of the young man who hath departed, and whose quickness prevented our horse from running away," she responded.

"And as a result of thy carelessness, stranger, his life was placed in jeopardy." John Gray spoke with marked control.

"Indeed! Then I am doubly sorry, sir. I hope that you will extend my apologies to him likewise, if you see him before I do."

"Before *thou* dost? How shouldst thou see him?"

"As it happens, my friend and I are planning to remain here for some days. I have just noticed that sign which indicates that we have reached the village of Content. It is scarcely a propitious arrival, but I trust that you will not hold this unfortunate occurrence up against us—against me, rather, for Mr. Hibbard was in nowise to blame." He looked straight at Faith as he spoke, and smiled slightly but with entire good-breeding. The girl

colored a little and dropped her eyes, and it was Gray who replied, "Thou hast frankly acknowledged thy fault and asked pardon therefor. It cannot but be granted, yet I trust that the recollection of this morning wilt serve as a lesson to thee. We are a mild, a forgiving people; others might not treat thee so leniently, and even though thine act was one of mere thoughtlessness, it might well have had serious consequences."

The speaker bowed his head slightly to indicate that the matter was ended. Means touched his cap, with an expression of humble contrition upon his face, and returned to his car. But his eyes were twinkling, and he deliberately winked at his companion. Gray turned and said, "Thy horse seemeth to be quieted, Jeremiah. Drive on."

"Giddap, Prof," commanded the latter. The old Prophet started, as decorously as though he had never so much as thought of cutting capers, and the rest of the gathering resumed their way meeting-housewards, keeping their looks averted from the automobile.

For a moment Means sat and watched them as they moved on with bowed heads and folded hand, meek and lowly of aspect. Then he laughed. " 'Less than the dust beneath my chariot wheel,' yet every one of them really as proud as punch, probably. I suppose that humility is emulated, here, with the same secret envy as *hauteur* among the four hundred. And *this* in nineteen hundred

and twenty-one, in this land of the fee and the home of the knave! Am I awake, Jack? Of course they're not real!"

"Your wrestler friend declared that they were. The gentleman with the long beard, who handed you out that fatherly lecture, looked real enough—and a yard wide. Do you know, I've a hunch that the one 'the Bull'—as you call him—referred to as 'a he-man' was the youth of the torn trousers; the village hero, who so suddenly departed with 'head bloody but unbowed.' "

"The chap Durham suggested as a sparring partner to train me back to health?" asked Means.

"Yes. If I'm right, you're welcome to him! I beg to be excused. He could knock your block off, and probably feels like doing it, at the present moment. What a college fullback he'd make! Did you see his stride and the way he hurdled that fence?"

"Rather. But while you're passing out the encomiums, what was the matter with the sweet Priscilla, whose forgiving look descended like a silent absolution upon my bowed and contrite head?"

"Not a thing, so far as I could see," Hibbard answered heartily.

"Precisely. I noticed the same limitations to observation, myself. Well, in a way it's refreshing to have *something* left to the imagination, again, isn't it?"

"Oh, cut it! I brought you out here into the



country in part to get you away from all that sort of thing, Bob."

"Hopeless task. Philadelphia, Paris, or Patagonia, there's no escaping the eternal lure of the lovely lass; anyway I've found it so, although my modest conquests have not yet included Quakers."

"And I hope that they won't, this time. Please bear in mind your friend the Bull's warning and his commission to me. Possibly your Priscilla was the very lady to whom he alluded, although she seemed to have a couple of children and a bald-headed husband. I'm beginning to be almost sorry that I brought you."

"I'm not. I thought that I'd be bored to death for the sake of my body and spirit, but something tells me that I am going to enjoy your party." He laughed, again, at the evidences of irritation appearing on Hibbard's countenance, and then continued, "Do you know, Jack, I'm beginning to think that there may be something in Quakerism. That girl certainly displayed a peacefulness which has long been absent from *my* soul—assuming that I still have one. I'm tempted to give it the acid test."

"What in thunder are you driving at, now?"

"Well, we've arrived just in time for church, haven't we?"

"Oh, cut out your nonsense and come on. We've got to reconnoiter for a place to pitch our camp."

"And we've got all the rest of the day to do it in. You're getting too material, Jack. Shame! This

is Sunday—can't you devote one single morning hour to your soul's good? 'Everybody's doing it,' apparently. Of course I believe in freedom of choice—let your conscience be your guide—but I'm going to church." Means spoke with a ludicrous assumption of righteousness. Then he smiled, and laughed outright. "Lord, what a yarn for the fellows at the club! They'll award me the pup, as prince of liars, without argument. I haven't been inside a church—except to attend a wedding—since God made little apples. It will be a novel experience—novelty's the spice of my life; and a harmless one, you'll have to admit."

"Shucks, you're not in earnest, Bob! You haven't the nerve to go in there, after the way those grave and reverend signors just glared at you," exclaimed Hibbard.

"Haven't I, though! My boy, nerve is the one thing I ain't got nothing else but. Besides, all the more reason for going. It is the custom of the country, and since we are going to dwell in their land we should render obedience to their laws. 'When in Rome,' you know."

He brought the car to a stop before the square gray Meeting House, and jumped promptly out, saying, "You may stay and guard our goods and chattels if you like, but *I'm* going in, and I think that I'll know how to behave. I was a cherubic little devil of a choir-boy once upon a time, I'll have you understand."

“Devil of a lot of good it did you,” grumbled Hibbard, but he descended and followed his friend into the building, hesitatingly.

The scene which presented itself to their unaccustomed eyes caused them to stop on the threshold with an amazement which bordered on a shock. Of course they had hardly expected—if either had had any expectations at all—to see an interior akin to that of a city church, with subdued light coming through colorful stained glass, richly carved and upholstered pews, carpeted aisles, a vested rector and choir. But this! What had they entered? A plain, bare room, without chancel, altar or even pulpit; without organ or singers, priest, rector, or parson; without any of the ecclesiastical and sacerdotal trappings which had, in their minds, become an integral part of religious worship. “Where two or three are gathered together in His name” had no significance for them, if indeed they had ever taken notice of that text. Stranger still was the silent congregation; the womenfolk and smaller children all on one side, the men on the other. “The sheep separated from the goats,” whispered Means, irreverently. And strangest of all in their eyes—the male part of the congregation wore its collective hat!

There was a slight stir as they entered. Even devoutly downcast eyes flickered long enough to focus the picture of the two city men standing in the doorway. John Gray quietly approached, and

welcomed them with the spirit of Christian brotherhood perfectly cloaking his surprise. The pair followed him to seats on the right side, Means whispering, " 'When in Rome'—as I said before," and he replaced the checked gray golf cap at a sporty angle on his head. Hibbard followed suit, and sat fidgeting uncomfortably. He knew that his head covering was a startling plaid and of so violent a green that his mother had frequently threatened to burn it up. In his mind's eye it now assumed monstrous proportions. There were a few hurriedly-hushed titters from the younger children, especially David, and Hibbard actually blushed. Confound Robert Means!

Meanwhile, the man whom he was confounding had quickly recovered from his initial embarrassment, and his bold gaze had sought out the corner where Faith Franklyn sat, a child on each side of her. She sensed the fact intuitively, and was distressed and a little angry, although she knew that anger should not be allowed to enter that hallowed place. Her head was lower bowed until only the tip of her shapely nose, her demure pink lips, and rounded chin showed; these, and a violet shadow on her left cheek where a dimple dwelt when she smiled.

Nothing happened.

The congregation sat with folded hands, silent. A gentle spring breeze danced over the waving grass and nodding clover-tops, catching up bits of their



fragrance and wafting it in through the open windows. Like an embodiment of the perfume, a tinted butterfly fluttered in and hovered for an instant over Dyer Dexter's head. There were a few more titters. The buzzing of a puzzled bee which had blundered into the room and could not seem to find its way out although every window was open, and the distant song of birds, were the only other sounds.

The long drive in the open air, and now the soothing effect of the place began to react upon Robert Means, who was never really wide-awake until after night had fallen. Looking at the unresponsive girl was an entertainment which quickly lost its power to hold him. His head bent lower. His eyes closed.

After the lapse of a surprisingly brief period of time Mark Gray was once more swinging his long legs down the dusty road towards the Meeting House. The blood was washed from his hair, now neatly parted and plastered down again. His Sabbath coat was freshly brushed and his torn nether garments had given place to the work-a-day pair of trousers, the ones which missed his boot tops by a full three inches; the hiatus was filled by the lighter gray of home-knit socks. Mark was uncomfortably conscious of the fact, and correspondingly embarrassed. But there was no one in sight—that was a blessing; and, although his head still buzzed a

little and felt tender to the touch, he swung swiftly along until his goal appeared in sight.

Then he stopped short.

Directly in front of the Meeting House stood the big and glistening motor car, unoccupied! Mark gasped. It seemed unbelievable that the man who had driven it so recklessly and been the near-cause of a serious accident, whose laughter had mocked his misfortune, should have dared to enter their place of worship. Yet it looked as though he had actually done so. Why?

Intuition is said to be an essentially feminine faculty, but occasionally men exercise it, especially when they are in love. Mark knew that the owner of the machine had returned and seen Faith. If it had been *he*, he would assuredly have stayed, braving the devil himself, and followed her. His lips drew tightly together; his nerves began to vibrate like wires under the sweep of the invisible fingers of a tempestuous wind, for a tempest was stirring his own soul. It fanned the spark of hatred, which had been kindled by Means' laughter, until it burned anew. For a moment the idea of striding into the building and jerking its defiler out by his coat collar flashed through his mind.

But habit conquered. Mark tip-toed into the silent place and paused. He knew every soul in Content, young and old. He knew where each sat. But to-day he found an anticipated jarring note in the gray symphony. On the men's side

appeared a glaring spot of color, supplied by Hibbard's offending cap and the bright cravats of the two strangers. From the exotic and discordant note in the general color scheme, Mark turned his eyes towards Faith. Her face was unusually pale. With set teeth he slipped into his accustomed straight-backed seat, which happened to be the one just behind that of the nodding Means.

His coming aroused the stranger for a moment, and his look again turned towards the girl in worship of whose physical charms he had entered, paganlike, into this house of God. It was no use; sleep lay heavily upon his eye-lids. There was nothing to break the monotonous silence, not even music, and the disturbing influence within their midst prevented any one from being moved by the Spirit to utter his or her prayerful thoughts aloud. Means yawned, and announced in a whisper to his friend that he had been a double-dyed ass to have come in. "Serves you jolly well right," answered the other. "Now you've got to stick it out, or be forever damned here." Means closed his eyes again; nodded; slept.

Mark had momentarily yielded to the religious spell of the spot. After the first wave of his re-born wrath had receded, he consciously prayed with his whole heart, prayed for strength to overcome his explosive passions which seemed like tinder, ever ready to ignite at the least spark. But this mood, too, passed. He could not see Faith, except



by craning his neck—and that was, of course, out of the question. His head ached; there was still dust in his nostrils which made him constantly want to sneeze. Mark knew the echo-provoking possibilities of *his* sneeze and struggled to restrain it. He drew out his handkerchief and used it, gently.

At the same instant Means gave an audible snore. The children tittered. A responsive smile appeared on Mark's lips, for he was, as he had said, still a boy at heart. It broadened as an audacious and mischievous plan sprang, full-grown, into his brain. He sternly checked the itching impulse to put it into effect, and really thought that he had conquered it. But the Tempter never yet fought fair. He pretends to take flight only to slip just out of sight, and bide his time until he can catch his adversary off his guard. For who can be eternally vigilant?

Again Mark had need of recourse to his handkerchief, and instinctively bent down behind the man in front of him. Just at that instant Means snored again. Then Satan made his move, thrusting the three-tined pitchfork of temptation sharply into Mark's soul. The blast which Mark blew was like that of Gabriel's trumpet. It might not have awakened the dead—it would be going too far to say that—but it certainly shattered the silence with startling effect. Many a Quaker jumped, and he who slept almost leaped from his seat, with a full-



voiced ejaculation of a shocking nature. Means turned, glared at the perpetrator of the outrageous act and, followed sheepishly by Mr. Hibbard, strode out of the building.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CAMP

DISGRACE; utter, ineffable!

Many of Mark's breaches of Quaker law and custom might be excused, but his latest act was, on the face of it, too shockingly deliberate; in his neighbors' eyes—or ears—nothing less than a profanation of God's House. He realized it before the echoes had died away. The involuntary smile, which had sprung to his lips with the startling success of his performance, faded swiftly. His head was light and dizzy from the force of his violent exhalation, and it seemed to him as though he were looking upon an undulating sea of eyes, all filled with the same expression—horror. There was one exception. Those of Faith Franklyn held pained reproach, which was worse. Mark's behavior had really been nothing worse than childish, yet he knew that his impulsive act had irretrievably cost him all his unexpected popularity, won that morning and so briefly enjoyed.

Some of the children had laughed again, and been hushed into silence by their mortified mothers, but David was still spasmodically giggling. Mark saw Friend Dyer Dexter glare at the boy. He read the

man's thoughts, and wished that the chastisement which he was mentally meting out to David might fall upon himself.

Shame and self-disgust overwhelmed him. On the instant he decided that Content should see the last of him to-morrow. Yes, he would accept the Bull's proposal. Why not? Every one would say, "good riddance." Well, perhaps not *every one*. His father and Sister Patience might miss him a little, for he knew that they loved him, but their first moments of unhappiness must soon yield to a real relief. Faith? The thought of her brought a deeper stab of self-commiseration. She might mourn for him, a little, but he strengthened his will with the thought that his sacrifice was in part for her good. It would be better for her if she should never see him again. He was marked for evil, and might as well quit fighting against himself and go completely to the bad. There was self-pity and a degree of comfort in that thought! And more in the one that he would be done with futile struggling, and could follow his natural bent.

The long hour of worship crept by; the meeting ended. Mark was the first to leave, and he hurried a little way apart so that none might speak to him even if any should desire to do so, which was not likely. Much sooner would they have taken a leper by the hand, he thought.

He saw Faith come out and pause, to look around as though seeking some one. Mark's heart

leaped a little, but he sternly stilled its action; of course he could not be the one she sought. But he was wrong, for she longed to speak to him and thank him again for saving them. Jeremiah, who had not gone inside, awoke from his doze and drove the Prophet from the open-faced shed to the road. Dyer Dexter was on hand to assist the girl into the carry-all, and Mark was too miserable to feel the pangs of jealousy, although he grew hot when the man lifted David to the high seat. He imagined that he gave the lad a furtive shake in mid-air. At least David gingerly rubbed his arms as he sat meekly down.

John Gray and Sister Patience came down the road, and Mark slipped from his place of semi-concealment behind a tree and fell in with them. They did not speak, but their silence was like a stinging lash to his soul. When they reached the gate he paused and touched the elder man almost timidly upon the arm.

"Father," he said, in a humble voice. "I know that I have grievously sinned again. There is no excuse that I can make to thee, but . . . I am very unhappy. Dost thou mind if I walk for a time? Perchance alone I can find heart to wrestle with mine adversary anew."

The other bowed his head and held open the gate for Patience to pass in. There were tears in her downcast eyes. The smith followed, and closed the gate.



But what youth in his early twenties, who is well, strong, and full of life, can stride across spring-time fields, soft and green and decked with flowers, while the birds are bursting their hearts with melodious song, and keep his mind fixed on doleful introspection? Certainly it was not within the power of Mark Gray! He meant to do so, and succeeded, for a time. But sunshine banishes inner as well as outward shadows; it is the great antiseptic for mental as well as physical ills.

He had fully intended to subject himself to the sternest moral discipline—the idea of going straight to the devil had not long been able to withstand the assault of his Quaker conscience—but within a few minutes his thoughts were wandering afield. After all, might he not yet redeem himself? If Faith would only pardon him, and give a word of encouragement, all would be well. He might yet hold his own wayward youth up as a warning to *his* children—and her's! What is imagination for, if not to assist those in the springtime of life to build castles-to-be; and, as winter draws nigh, to help man reconstruct in dreams the scattered stones of fallen hopes?

Mark's thoughts flew before him to cluster, like homing pigeons, about the Franklyn farmhouse, and his feet unconsciously turned thitherwards, although he had no real intention of visiting it—then. The hour was not propitious. Nevertheless, when he topped a gentle rise, and saw it below him, nes-

tled picturesquely amid trees hoary with years and flowers in the first bloom of life, his pace quickened. Then he brought himself to an abrupt stop. There came the familiar physical symptoms which, with him, always accompanied an anger impulse.

For in front of the gate stood an automobile, the same car which he had seen before the Meeting House! Three diminutive figures stood beside it, and Mark recognized them all—the two strangers, and Faith. What could it mean? A sense of jealousy and of wrath at the man's utter presumption joined to urge him forward, and an unnamed fear lent wings to his feet. His walk became almost a run as he covered the intervening distance with long strides.

Mark reached the road a few rods from the gate, and vaulted the fence. The sound caused the three in conversation to glance up and turn towards him, and the expression of each indicated that his arrival was not without surprise and a deeper meaning for them. Mr. Hibbard grinned a little in recollection of what had gone before, but it was clear that he was not entirely at ease. Nor was Means, who looked annoyed; nor Faith, whose countenance showed various feelings. As Mark drew near, the girl smiled, however, and spoke simply.

“I had scarcely expected to see thee, Friend Mark; but, as it happeneth, thou hast come at a good time, for I know not what answer to make these gentlemen. You see, I have no menfolk to advise me,

and I was on the point of going to ask Friend Dyer Dexter. . . .”

“Nay. That is not necessary,” Mark interrupted hastily. “If chance hath made me of service to thee, Sister Faith, I am only too glad. What . . . ?”

Robert Means appeared still more annoyed, but his companion stepped quickly forward and held out his hand, saying, “I agree with Miss . . . Miss Franklyn, isn’t it? . . . that your coming is opportune, for undoubtedly a friend’s advice will be of assistance to her. My name is Hibbard, and this is my friend and companion, Mr. Robert Means—both of Philadelphia.” The latter acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod of his head. “And if I’m any sort of a guesser, you are the young man of whom Mr. Durham, sometimes called ‘the Bull,’ spoke to us in such glowing terms. He told me to look you up—if you really are the one, the chap who runs the garage?”

Mark’s dark looks disappeared and he grasped the speaker’s hand warmly. Mr. Hibbard was obviously frank and trustworthy, and if he were a friend of the big-hearted wrestler he could not be so bad.

“It is rather a coincidence,” continued Hibbard. “Before I met Mr. Durham, I had my plans made to come to Content this week. You see, I’m a civil engineer and am working for the B. & O. As you may know, the railroad is planning a branch to run through this valley, and my job is to make

the preliminary surveys. I persuaded Mr. Means to come along as a camping companion—the 'Bull' suggested it, for he is really his friend, and Mr. Means hasn't been altogether well."

"Yea, verily I understand now," broke in Mark. "That is a tent in the back of thy car, is it not?"

"Exactly. We've been scouting around for a good place to pitch it, you see, and the hillside over there struck us as made to order for a camp-site. There's nothing better than a pine grove, you know, and a brook at the foot of the hill gives us running water."

Mark nodded. He liked this young man, and was really becoming interested in his problem. If the other had not been along. . . . He turned, abruptly, and said, "Friend Means, I owe thee an apology. Of a verity I can make no excuse for what I did in the Meeting House. It . . . it just came out." He was very red of face and stammered forth his words.

Mr. Hibbard laughed. "It did. That's no joke. I can understand, for I'm a bit of a kid, myself; but I'll bet that you're going to catch it from some of those present—or I'm no judge of human nature. Come, Bob. The young man is holding out the olive branch; it's up to you to kiss and make up. Besides, you owe him a hanged sight more serious amends."

Means answered, shortly, "I do, and I make them now. We're square in that respect, sir, and I shall



be glad to . . . er . . . reimburse you for the damage I unwittingly caused to your . . . er . . . garments, for it seems that you injured them stopping a horse which I, unknowingly, frightened."

"Nay, it was nothing. Thou owest me nothing." Mark flushed still more deeply. Faith looked happy. A great weight had been lifted from her heart by Mark's frank declaration and the acceptance of his apology. He was not evil; no one who would so bravely acknowledge a fault could be sinful at heart. She had her gratitude to express, but not until the strangers had departed.

"All hunky dory," remarked Mr. Hibbard, merrily. "But this isn't helping Miss Franklyn. We ran across the . . . the gentleman who was driving her carriage this morning—he of the wig, you know—and learned from him that the spot we have set our hearts upon belongs to this young lady. Hence our presence here, and our present request that she grant us permission to use it for a week or ten days. Of course it goes without saying that we shall pay for the privilege—we would accept it under no other condition. Won't you say a good word in our behalf? I can assure you that we are law-abiding and respectable."

Mark turned towards the girl with a look of inquiry.

"I know not what to say, Mark. Surely I would like to oblige them, but I have never had such a request before," she said in some perplexity. Mr.

Hibbard casually stepped back to the machine and Means followed him, leaving the other two free to discuss the matter in private. Lowering her voice a little, Faith hurried on, "They appear to be gentlemen, and they have offered to pay me a sum even larger than I could think of accepting—and thou knowest that I can ill-afford to refuse an opportunity to make all I can for . . . for the children's sake."

"Yea, I know, Faith. If only . . ." Mark stopped himself. It was no time for him to declare that which was in his heart, and he felt himself drawn between conflicting thoughts. He knew that the girl sadly needed the money which she could make by renting the camp-site, and there might well be not the slightest danger from her doing so. The strangers would be in the neighborhood, at any event. But, in spite of his impulsive liking for Mr. Hibbard, the fire of his initial hostility towards the other still smoldered. His apology had seemed to Mark to be from the lips merely, and he had seen him look at Faith in a manner which instinctively aroused his keen resentment. The former consideration won.

"I can think of no real reason why thou shouldst not accede to their request, Sister Faith," he answered gravely. "Since they will undoubtedly be at their labors all day, they can scarcely bother thee, and no harm can result from their occupying the place for a brief time."

Faith lowered her eyes and the color deepened a

little in her cheeks, as it often did when Mark was near. "I am glad that thou approveth, Friend Mark," she said. "I, too, can see no danger from it, and it will be much to my financial advantage—although I would not think of that, on the Sabbath. Indeed, my chief reason for hesitating was not so much on my own account as that of Jeremiah. These strangers seem to be gentlemen as I have said, but I know his manifold weakness and cannot forget what occurred when the other men from the city were here, working on the state highway. Dost thou remember?"

She appeared so deeply distressed that Mark had to laugh as he responded, "Who in Content doth not remember? I do, indeed! Was I not one of the mischievous youths who discovered him sound asleep in thy father's farm wagon, the evening that the strangers stupefied him with strong drink, and removed the oxen from it and hid them?"

"I thought that perchance thou wert." Faith smiled faintly. "Perhaps it was wicked of thee, but it taught him a lesson."

The other two turned and glanced at them, as Mark's young laughter rang out gayly. "Never shall I forget the expression upon his face when he awoke, nor the way he rubbed his eyes and exclaimed, 'My name is Jeremiah Jones, and I work for Friend James Franklyn, that's sartain. And now I've either found a cart or lost a pair of fine oxen and danged if I know which.' "



“Mark, thou shouldst not say words like that—even to repeat them! The other morning . . . the morning when . . .” In utter confusion she stopped and turned away to hide her blushes, but before he could speak in reply, and he did not know how to begin, she hastily reverted to the present topic. “Jeremiah is weak, and it appeareth that the men of the city have many vices. These two truly are not like those workmen, but if they should have . . . wine with them . . .”

“There is little for thee to fear on that score, Faith, I think,” broke in the man with some relief. “Thou knowest that liquor hath been prohibited in this country, now, which is surely a blessing. Nay, I should not worry. Nothing is likely to occur from their presence to trouble thee, and if aught doth thou hast only to send for me.” It was a simple statement, sincerely made without bombast, and the girl thrilled at it. He had declared himself her knight and to his chivalric protection she as simply committed herself with the word, “Yea, I know Mark, and I thank thee.”

Faith raised her clear eyes to his, for an instant, and Mark felt like a new man, imbued with the spirit of a sacred trust. He mentally vowed that he would, from that moment on, be worthy of her words of confidence and the look which had accompanied them. The formal restraint of many of his neighbors often irked him, but not the sweet and natural simplicity of this girl, with whom it



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was never a cloak worn in conformity with Quaker custom, but rather an outward expression of inward nature. "I know, Mark, and I thank thee." Such words from the lips of Faith Franklyn held a world of meaning; far more than any amount of fervent protestation from the average woman.

The die was cast. She turned towards Mr. Hibbard and said, "I have decided. Thou mayest place thy camp upon the hillside."

And so another seed, unwittingly sown by the Bull, took root.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE PLEDGE—AND THE PITFALL

“GOOD!” exclaimed Mr. Hibbard heartily. As he rejoined Faith and Mark he casually drew a package of bills from a leather folder and offered one of the ten dollar denomination to the girl. She shook her head quickly. “When thou art ready to depart, thou mayest pay me. I do not charge in advance, and besides it is not lawful to transact business upon the Lord’s day. Perhaps I should not have seemed to bargain with thee at all, but since you are here without place to lay your heads . . .”

Hibbard smiled, boyishly. “We, not you, are the offenders. You have gained a good mark on St. Peter’s books for, if I correctly remember my Sunday-school teaching, we are enjoined to care for the stranger.”

Means broke in with the suggestion, “Perhaps the young man will be willing to accompany us and give us a hand—for a consideration—in pitching the tent. Lord, but it’s warm for this time of year. But I forgot. Probably he has similar religious scruples.”

“Assuredly I have,” Mark responded, none too

graciously. "We, at least, have not wholly forgotten the ten commandments, although it would seem that those of the city have."

"A hit! A palpable hit!" cried Hibbard, "I am 'touched,' too, and admit the error of my ways. We are votaries of Baal and worship the golden calf, but I think that if I could live here for a while I might regain something of the lost simple faith of my childhood. I've always held that being close to nature is being close to God."

"Verily thou art right, friend. I wish that thou mightest stay among us, and win thy way back from the broad path which leadeth to destruction to that straight and narrow one which leadeth unto life." Faith spoke with the sweet sincerity of her kind, and the new-comer flushed a little. All the levity had departed from his voice as he answered, quietly, "I almost wish that I might, little lady. Well, we'll be on our way. May we have your permission to use this gate, for I see that the cart path which runs from the barn back across the field passes close by our new location?"

"Assuredly thou mayest use it, whenever thou hast need. And since thy tent appeareth heavy, I will later send Jeremiah to aid thee in setting it up. He is strong, despite his frailty, and . . ." her eyes took on the suggestion of a twinkle, ". . . he is not of our faith, alas."

"Nor, perhaps, adverse to earning a dollar, even on the Sabbath? We are deeply in your debt, and

I hope that I may some day repay the obligation, Miss Franklyn."

"Nay, thou owest me nothing; save that which every man oweth his neighbor," smiled Faith.

"Are you referring to the eleventh commandment?" Means challenged. "You see I, too, went to church once."

The girl grew red, and Mark white and suddenly tense. "I meant . . . good-will," she answered.

"For the love of heaven use some judgment," growled Hibbard in an undertone, as he led the way back to the car. "That girl isn't the kind for you or any man to make a plaything of, and you'll have the young giant down on you like a thousand of bricks if you don't mind your step, and lay off twitting him."

"I should worry," was the other's airy response, and as the car slid past the pair by the gate he turned and waved his hand in farewell to Faith, obviously ignoring Mark.

The girl's eyes turned instinctively upon her companion's face. The expression thereon terrified her, so that she unconsciously stepped back a pace. He was very white, his jaw was thrust forward like a clinched fist; under lowered lids his eyes glinted with flinty light. Conquering herself, she returned and laid one hand appealingly on his tensed forearm. She could feel the cords like vibrating steel wires within it. He laid his own hand over her's, almost crushing it.



“Mark! Why dost thou look like that? Thou frightenest me!”

“He waved to thee.”

“Yea. I, too, was displeased for an instant. But it was a small thing—perhaps a custom of the city that we know of. Surely it was nothing to cause thee to appear . . .”

“I do not know how I appeared, but I could not help it. I’m sorry, Faith, if I caused thee further distress, and sorry that I allowed mine anger to overcome my self-restraint . . . as it always doth, it seems.”

“Oh, Mark, I cannot understand thee! Thou art different—different from all other men of mine acquaintance. I am disturbed, I know not why. One moment thou art so kindly and gentle—as when thou art with the children, or dumb beasts, all of whom worship thee; the next . . .”

“I know. As I have told thee before, I cannot understand myself.” He groaned, beneath his breath, and resting his arms on the gate bent low in shame. “Do not praise me for aught. I am wholly unworthy; deserving only of the condemnation of all men, and especially of thee.”

“Nay, thou art not! This morning all were praising thee for thy bravery and quickness of thought and action. I have not yet thanked thee. . . . I wanted to do so after the meeting, but . . .”

Again he interrupted, with, “Do not thank me.

Any man would have done the same, if . . . Besides, it was not bravery, but impulse, and really no different from the act whereby I startled the worshipers in the Meeting House. Something within, yet a force outside of myself, impelled me to do both things. It is right that I should be blamed for yielding to the incentive which was wrong, but why should I be praised for doing that which was right, since it required no conscious decision on my part? How can a man be justly called 'brave,' if he merely doth that which is natural to him and doth not know what fear is? The really brave man is he who is afraid and yet goeth forward in the face of his fear and performeth the task which the command of his officer, his conscience, or Fate layeth upon him. Nay, I am not brave, Faith. I am weak and easily swayed, like a reed shaken by every breeze of impulse."

"Thou art too critical of thyself, Mark. But I understand how thou feelest—better, I think, than any one else; though I know not why I should. Oh, if I could help thee!"

"*Don't, Faith!* If thou speakest in that tone I cannot endure it, nor long hold myself in check. Thou rememberest what I did that other morning when I was here. . . . I have been too ashamed to speak of it before, yet my shame also hath been my glory, because . . ." She checked him by her hand laid upon his eager lips, and it was all that he could do to refrain from seizing and kissing it

passionately. Very gently she said, "Nay, let us not speak of that at all. I . . . I think that I understand in this case, too, Mark."

"Of a verity thou art an angel, Faith," cried the man. "I have no right to speak to thee of love and marriage now—I am wholly unworthy—but thou knowest well enough that I do care for thee. Nay, I will say it. I love thee madly. Thou knowest it, Faith?"

In the merest whisper came her answer, "I . . . I think that thou carest, Mark."

"It is true. Not that it was a real excuse for my behavior then, but . . ."

Still more softly she answered, "Perhaps it was. Hast thou forgotten that the wise King Solomon said that one of the three things which he could not understand was . . ."

"What, Faith?"

"'The way of a man with a maid.' " Her eyes were lifted to his for an instant, but quickly dropped again before the burning intensity of his gaze. Mark took her unresisting hand once more and pressed it close against his breast, but as he did not speak she continued, "Perchance thine action was somewhat unseemly, but I . . . I have long since forgiven thee."

"Faith."

"Yea, Mark."

"Thou canst help me, if thou wilt. I do not ask thy love—I have need to prove myself more

worthy of it, first—but if thou wilt only tell me that thou carest a little, and still have faith in me, I think that thy words will be like blows of the hammer on the white-hot iron of my will, shaping and strengthening it. I have grievous need to conquer mine impulses, yet although I often tell myself that I am wicked, I do not feel *wicked* in my heart.”

“Of course thou art not! If thou wilt only strive earnestly to know the will of Our Father, thou canst overcome in all things. That is the first precept of our faith, Mark, as it should be of all mankind. And I do care and believe in thee.” She felt the trembling of his hand upon her’s and saw his free arm reach out to embrace her, whereupon she added, in haste, “Nay, Thou must begin to practice self-control *now*, if thou wouldst have me believe that thou art indeed in earnest.”

Mark released her hand instantly, and stepped back, pale and with face set, but smiling a little.

“I thank thee, Faith. From this moment thou shalt be my guardian angel, even though that savors of papacy. And I shall win through, for thy sake, and then . . .”

“Nay, for thine own sake, not mine. But . . . Oh, Mark, dear Mark, I do love thee.”

She turned, and fled towards the house.

The man was almost dazed, as though an overpowering radiance had suddenly burst upon his senses. His heart throbbed with a delight akin to pain, and there was a faint ringing in his ears like



music afar off, but very beautiful. His blood had changed to sparkling wine. For a moment he stood, yielding his soul to his inner sensations; then he sternly checked them and the riotous thoughts which they called forth. This was far from keeping his promise, which struck deeper than restraint of action, to the very impulses which bred it. So keen a pleasure must be wrong! "Oh God, I thank thee for her love. Help me; strengthen me; make me at last worthy of it," he prayed, almost aloud.

Never in all human history had a man charged himself with a firmer resolve to act with restraint in all things, than Mark at that moment. Never had one a clearer pattern to follow in the fulfillment of that resolve. The teachings and precepts of his faith, the ever-present example of his neighbors, his whole environment joined to make clear and smooth an undeviating course for his spiritual feet to follow. But it verily seems as though the jade, Fate, were at times given wholly over to mischief-making, and took especial delight in preparing pitfalls for those who would walk most uprightly with their eyes on the stars.

Mark started homeward, his heart shouting pæans of joy. He passed up the drive and by the closed door within the rose-embowered porch—how different it appeared to him now! He passed the big barn; from its open doorway Jeremiah hailed him, and he paused.

The man came shuffling out, hand extended, and

Mark grasped it with a pressure that made the other wince and brought tears to his bleary weak eyes. "Dang your hide, Mark Gray!" he exclaimed. "Just for that I ain't a-goin' to thank you for stoppin' the Prophet this morning—although I ain't sayin' that I ain't much obliged. I didn't know that the old reprobate had so much life in him. Gosh, but he pulled—thought he'd pull my arms plumb out of their sockets. Say, Mark, did any one ever tell you that you was wastin' your time, here? You'd ought to be one of them movie actors, that's what you'd ought to be, boy. I reckon you ain't never seen a movie, have you? Too bad. This village is dead; been dead all its life. I seen a movie show when I was in Philly, a while back—a rip-snorter. *That's* real life for you; life and romance—there ain't neither one nor t'other, here. Danged if I know how I stand it! There was a feller in one of the pictures I seen that done just what you done this mornin', only he was on hossback, a cowboy—it was a wild west picture. Gee, but he was a hero, he could ride and fight and shoot and . . . and everything, and I'll bet that you could, too, if somebody'd larn you, and you're a danged sight better lookin' than this Hart feller was. I'll tell you the whole story some day, maybe, but anyway he saved the girl like you done, and he married her, too. That's life for you, I say."

Mark, with mild amusement, had been listening to the man run on, but at the conclusion of his

story he thrilled a little. Was it life, and would it follow, even in Content? Most devoutly he hoped so.

With a conscious laugh he responded, "I guess that I am no movie hero, Jeremiah, but . . . Well, never mind."

"Oh, you can't fool me, with your 'never minds,' my son. I ain't so blind that I can't see through a hole in the fence. And I think Faith's goin' to fall for you, although I'll tell you frankly that she's a danged sight too good for you or any man." He grinned, and the expanse of alternating tooth and space grew still broader as Mark grew more and more red. The youth turned and fled from him, whereupon Jeremiah burst into cackling laughter.

So Jeremiah understood! Mark loved and was loved, and at least one other knew and sympathized. Great happiness took full possession of him, banishing every other thought. The possible difficulties in his path to the consummation of his hope, his own short-comings and present disgrace had no place in his mind; his soul was a well filled with pure water, reflecting no shadow, but only the unblemished blue of the sky above. He rejoiced in the broad spaces of the meadowland which he was traversing; the fenced-in road could not have held his winging thoughts nor yet his buoyant feet. The spring grass had never felt so soft to his tread nor appeared so verdant to his eyes. The heavens



had never looked so radiantly clear. A thrush started upward from a tuft of grass, winging skyward and singing as it went. He wanted to sing, too, and run and leap.

The winding brook, the one which flowed past the foot of the hill upon which the city men were to pitch their camp and where they were already to be seen unpacking their machine, barred his course. It seemed to laugh with him as it rippled by, merry and free. At the spot where his homeward path crossed it the little stream was some six yards in breadth. It narrowed on either hand, but what was such a watery obstacle to Mark's soaring thoughts and sinewy thews? Merely a challenge! Besides, he had set out to conquer all obstacles which beset his way.

Mark had already started to run—forgetful of the fact that it was the Sabbath—and he measured the distance with his eye, and leaped mightily. His feet landed on the further bank, both together. Then the pitfall. The grassy verge of the stream caved beneath his weight, and as he fell forward his legs went knee-deep into the water, while mud and new loam smeared his pantaloons almost waist-high.

From up on the hillside came faintly to his ears the mocking laugh which he had heard once before that day.

Rage repossessed Mark for just a moment. Then he, too, laughed. After all, his behavior and



mishap had alike been ludicrous, and to-day he could well smile over it. His somewhat rueful smile vanished, however, when he recollected the fact that his second and last remaining pair of trousers had been rendered temporarily *hors de combat*, and with it came the realization that he would have to move most circumspectly to reach home unseen. If any dweller in Content should catch sight of him, thus, on the Sabbath day . . . ! Mark made a wide detour and covertly approached the back door of his house, unobserved.

After the three members of John Gray's household had departed from the Meeting House, several of the venerable Friends had, prompted by Dyer Dexter, remained in a group by the roadside for the purpose of discussing, with shaking heads and shocked looks, Mark's latest breach of Quaker decorum. It is axiomatic of Quaker worship that, although there is no duty laid on any one to participate in spoken prayer or praise, every worshiper is personally responsible for the maintenance of the right spiritual atmosphere during meeting time. The young man had seriously and apparently with deliberation outraged that sacred hour, and the little conclave proceeded to discuss the incident solemnly. Had it stood alone they might have been charitable, but it was merely the latest in a long series of scandalous incidents in which Mark had figured, to the spiritual—and sometimes material—

discomfiture of his neighbors. Ill news travels on speeding wings and Dexter had sped many messengers bearing the story of how he had seen the youth at the smithy, rolling upon the ground in vicious physical conflict with the city man.

The time for mere silent censure had passed; something must be done, something drastic. Mark had verily made himself a subject for serious discussion at the next Monthly Meeting. And John Gray must be advised of that fact!

The informal committee had, for some time, been closeted with the smith. Friend Dyer Dexter had gone straight to the point; a disagreeable duty had best be squarely faced!

"We have come to speak of Mark Gray, Friend John," he had said, talking through his nose.

"Yea?"

"Yea, verily. We know that thou hast labored long and with commendable patience with the young man, doing all that lay within thy power—albeit, perhaps, with a christian forbearance beyond what the law requires—and that thou art more to be pitied than blamed because Mark is not . . ."

John Gray had checked him with a gesture, and answered sorrowfully, "Nay, the burden is wholly mine to bear, and I make no excuses if I have failed in my duty toward the lad. I know how often he hath erred through impulse, and to say that I—that *we*—can explain those impulses is not to con-

done them. But this thing I do know, as none other knows it. He is not evil at heart, but honorable and tender, and often shame layeth a heavy hand upon his soul because of his acts."

"That may well be—I trust that it is indeed so, for he hath cause for much disquietude of mind," Dexter had responded with a puritanical sternness. "But there are others than himself to be considered. The entire village hath been repeatedly offended by his frequent lapses from seemly conduct—such as that which occurred within the hour. And there are the youths who, because he is strong and a leader by nature, look up to and even emulate him, in so far as they dare. Nay, we dislike to hurt thee, but Mark Gray hath become a festering sore within our body politic, and . . ."

John Gray's countenance had paled and his heavy jaw set in a manner to warn almost any one. But when he spoke in reply his voice had been calm and unruffled. "The youth is *not* bad, Friend Dyer. He fully realizes his own shortcomings, and is fighting valiantly to conquer them and, despite what happened this morning, I can say with assurance that he is beginning to mend his ways. In fact, I feel that I can vouch . . ."

The speaker stopped in the middle of his sentence. For his eyes had at that moment fallen upon Mark, through the side window, as he cautiously made his way towards the kitchen door. Wet to his waist, muddy and bedraggled, hat off

and wavy hair clinging in ringlets to his damp forehead, the lad made a picture startling enough to interrupt any speech.

The others within the room glanced up in surprise, and John Gray hastily collected himself and continued, in even tone, “. . . can vouch that the time will yet come when you, and all in Content will be glad to call him ‘Friend.’ We know the fountainhead of his manifold temptations; we know, too, that there is a Power which can supply him with the strength to overcome them. Let us, therefore pray for him, with bowed heads and closed eyes.”

Even at that moment the smith was praying fervently, praying that that Omnipotent Power would prevent Mark from entering the room. He fell upon his knees and the rest, more slowly, followed his lead.

And into this silent group, an instant later, burst Mark, smiling with relief because he had gained the refuge of his own home unseen, and blithely humming—without realization that he was doing it—“Oh, by gee, by gosh, by gum, by Jove.”



## CHAPTER XIV

### TEMPTATION

THE morning sun shone down upon the tent of the camping pair, but whereas it was brightly reflected in the healthy glow on Hibbard's face, refreshed by slumber, it merely accentuated the finely graven lines of weariness on that of his companion. Means' first night in "the wilderness"—as he called it—had not been a conspicuous success, and he was out of sorts. His back, used to box mattresses, had found the canvas topped cot an inquisitioner's bed and ached in many an unsuspected muscle. He was naturally fastidious about his food, especially in the morning when a jaded appetite needed to be coaxed and wheedled to perform at all, and greasy bacon and boiled coffee, thick with grounds, had been insult added to injury. Hibbard had been obliged to "take it," from the moment of their arising—which, unfortunately, he had proclaimed in army fashion, just when Mr. Robert Vandervetter Means was enjoying the delightful drowse which so provokingly comes just at dawn, after a wakeful night.

Now he was standing before the raised flap of the tent, smoking an after-breakfast cigarette, and letting his moody eye roam over the pleasant

country-side, until it rested on the Franklyn farm. His face assumed a more animated expression. Whatever his thoughts may have been, they were rudely interrupted by his comrade, who remarked in the jovial tone which he was, with an effort, affecting. "Well, Bob, how does it seem to be a laboring man again—perhaps I should have put it, 'for once in your life'?"

"For heaven's sake stop scraping that knife against the bottom of that frying pan—it sets my nerves on edge!" exclaimed Means, irritably. "What do you mean, 'laboring man'? I thought that I was supposed to have come to this God-forsaken dump for a rest."

"A change, old fellow. Your life has been one long, sweet, restful song to date—and see what it's done to you! No, sir. You tearfully promised your wrestling friend to turn over a new leaf—a whole flock of new leaves, in fact—and begged me, almost on bended knee, to make you do it."

"I was drunk."

"I suspected the same. But the fact, and my promise, stands. Have you forgotten that you're down on the company's books as my chain boy for this job? You suggested it yourself and, since you wouldn't allow me to bring any other assistant, you've got to come through. Besides, it was to have been share and share alike in the camp work. Remember that?"

Means scowled, and growled, "Damn. Yes, I

have a hazy recollection of making a fool of myself that night. I'd got myself intoxicated to a state where I was fairly maudlin, and an easy mark for the Bull's prophetic utterances regarding the dire things which would happen to me if I should keep on leading my natural life. 'Oh, that men should put an enemy into their mouths, to steal away their brains.' "

The other laughed at him. "To my way of thinking you're wiser drunk than sober, Bob. Your 'natural' life is utterly artificial. Your 'lights' are out, and your liver is dead—as you will be soon, if you don't cut out wine, woman and song."

"Well, I might consider the elimination of singing from my repertoire," grinned Means.

"Old stuff. Look here, Bob, I'm serious about this. You're a good fellow, at heart, and have a more-than ordinary amount of gray matter, but what good does it do you, or the world? Perhaps you'll say that it's none of my infernal business—that the Biblical injunction about being your brother's keeper is as out of date as the Ten Commandments, but . . . Oh, hang it all, give yourself a chance. Cut out the booze and . . . and the needle. I've seen the scars on your left forearm, my friend," he added, significantly.

"Thanks! You quite touch me." Means' tone was scathingly sarcastic. "Between you and our Quaker friends I shall probably become too good

to be true, during the next fortnight, and 'mine old familiar haunts' will know me no more. And now let's talk about something else. I've apparently got myself in Dutch, but I'll go through and work out my self-imposed penance, thereby teaching myself a salutary lesson against the future. What's my job? Wise me up—as the Bull would say, in his cultured speech."

"You'll receive your elaborate instructions in holding a surveyor's rod when we get into the field, and I want to make an early start this morning. Meanwhile, lend a hand here, in penance for your many sins, and bury this nice garbage."

"What's the use? Throw it out behind a bush, somewhere, and let the birds be our scavengers."

"And you call yourself a camper! Do you want all the flies in Content camping here, too?"

"All right. You're boss, I suppose. Hand it over." Keeping his eyes averted from the painful of perfectly fresh scraps, Means walked a little way from the tent. There he stopped, and his look brightened again. It was close to a quarter of a mile from the spot to the Franklyn farmhouse, yet his eyes had caught sight of three marionette forms, whom he recognized as Faith and the two children, walking together down the drive to the road. He unceremoniously tossed the refuse into a bush and scaled the pan back towards the tent. Then he headed for his car, calling out over his shoulder, "I say, Jack, we developed a knock in the engine, com-



ing down, and since we'll need the car to run over to the village for mail and provisions I had better have it examined and the tank refilled with gas. Be back inside of half an hour, old top, and you can be looking over the lay of the land."

Hibbard uttered a bit of profanity under his breath. He had already begun to wish, fervently, that he had not yielded to the soft-hearted impulse which prompted his suggestion that Means become his companion for the trip. He stepped to the tent opening and called, "Can't that wait until . . . ." The ending of his sentence was suddenly drowned out in the roar of the racing motor. It was throttled down, and the machine moved bumpily off across the field towards the cart path.

"Damn!" said the surveyor explosively, and returned to his work.

David was going to school; Faith to market, as the big basket on her arm proclaimed; little Hope was to walk only to the gate and then return to the doubtful watching of Jeremiah in the garden. They had all reached the highway when Means' car coasted down the steep drive and was brought to a stop beside them. Its owner leaned out and exclaimed, with a fine show of surprise, "Why, Miss Franklyn. I hardly expected to see you up, and out, at *this* hour of the morning."

Faith had been a little startled by his sudden appearance, but his words brought the shadow of a

smile to her lips. "Dost thou, then, call this early?" she responded. "Nay I have been up for two hours, and am much delayed in starting for the village, because . . ." She checked herself, but David promptly supplied the true ending to her sentence, saying, "The old Prophet hath gone lame—he strained a leg or something when he almost ran away yesterday. *Thou* art to blame for it, Jeremiah saith."

"Really? I am more than sorry, and shall certainly insist upon paying for his disability, Miss Franklin."

"Nay, I cannot . . ."

"But I insist. It is only just that I should. Surely you were not intending to *walk* all the way to the village, and perhaps bring back some bundles!"

"Why not? It is but a little distance—only a mile and a half by the short cut. I walk it almost daily," said the girl.

"But not to-day. I am on my way there and shall be delighted to take 'you—all of you, of course. I am fortunate to have run into you, like this—figuratively speaking; I came altogether too near to doing the actual thing, yesterday. You're off to market, I should judge, and I for gasoline, since cars like human beings need their appointed sustenance."

Faith's distress was apparent. She started a hesitating refusal, not knowing how to decline

courteously, and Mr. Means interrupted with, "Of course you can come! The little lad is sufficient chaperon, if such were needed, which is not the case with near neighbors." He laid his hand on David's shoulder, and the boy promptly squirmed away. He did not like the man, but the lure of the machine was over-powering and he cried, "Why can we not go in it, sister Faith? And take the boxes of vegetables, too? Thou saidst, this morning, that unless thou couldst get up courage enough to ask Friend Dyer Dexter for the loan of pokey old Ned, we would lose some of the money that we so sorely need to make both ends meet. And Hope can go, too, and come back with you. That'll stop her crying."

"I wathn't cryin'," insisted his small sister, stoutly.

Faith had colored richly during David's naïve remarks, and her eyes had taken on an expression of deeper distress which only added to the sweet appeal of her face. Again she would have refused, but Means took swift advantage of the opening thus presented, although the idea of loading his perfectly appointed touring car with garden truck stole something from the anticipation of a companionable drive to and from the village. "Of course you must let me take you, and the boxes as well, Miss Franklyn. I owe it to you. Besides, it is really your christian duty to accept my invitation, for I'm afraid that I am not often prompted

to do a neighborly act, and if you should refuse, I would feel that my single seed of kindness had fallen on barren ground, and be tempted never to sow another."

Robert Means there proved himself a diplomat as well as a courtier. The still small voice within Faith's heart, which had been reiterating, "No, no, no," grew silent. The several practical reasons which had been arguing strongly against her desire—for she had never ridden in a motor car—was now routed by this challenge to her religion. And what possible harm could there be in it,—especially with both children along? David was already on the running board and fingering the spotless enamel about the door handle, to Means' secret agony.

As a final concession to conscience, she faltered, "I'm afraid that . . ."

"You need not be," interrupted the man, laughing pleasantly. "I may appear a bit reckless, at times, but I have the reputation for being a skillful driver, and will promise to substantiate it now, and add caution thereto. We'll be either the hare or the tortoise at your command."

He was already holding the front door invitingly open and . . . Faith entered. The two children scrambled gayly in behind them, whereupon David commanded, "Drive back to the barn and I'll get Jeremiah to load her up. Gee . . . Oh, I didn't mean to say that, sister Faith . . . this is great. Although I wish it was a *red* car, like . . ."



*"I with it wath blue,"* put in little Hope.

In the blackened smithy Mark Gray was seeking and finding a moiety of relief for his burdened heart in strenuous labor. Disgrace lay like a dark mantle upon him. The worst had happened, despite all his high promises to self. Dyer Dexter had had his way. He—Mark Gray, son of the man esteemed by all in Content—was to be disciplined at the next monthly; perhaps formally driven out from the Society and, necessarily, from the village. All his immediate neighbors knew it, already. Faith would know it the instant that she arrived with her farm produce for market. Every hoof-beat upon the hard roadway struck dismay into his heart, but none of them had yet been those of the old Prophet. Why? Surely she was very late, and David would be tardy in getting to school.

He was blowing for the smith, and the big bellows closed and expanded so forcefully, under the impelling of his strong arm, that the chimney roared and the sparks flew from the charcoal fire in clouds. There was a fascination in watching them, and seeing how many he could start skyward at a time—the age-old appeal of the fire to the Norman viking blood within his veins. But even this way of temporary forgetfulness was quickly closed to him, for his father remarked, mildly, "Thou art wasting the coals, my son. Perhaps I had better blow, and thou strike, for a time."

Mark came back from his dreams to realization of the present, and without a word exchanged work with the smith. For a moment all went well. Then he chanced to look out through the smithy door . . . and his lifted hammer crashed down upon the red-hot horseshoe which he was shaping, with such force that it flew into two sections. Wrath clouds veiled his face and, in his black leathern apron and mighty bared arms, to which the glow of the fire imparted a coppery sheen, he appeared like a youthful Thor, preparing to hurl a thunderbolt.

John Gray looked up, amazed. Then his eyes likewise turned to the roadway and beheld what Mark had seen—Faith, riding past in the automobile of the city stranger.

He, too, scowled, but said quickly, "Mark! Oh *lad*, again?"

Mark did not this time respond, but sternly turned his back to the doorway and took up another iron from the glowing coals. It was no hotter than his heart, which was too fully charged for expression. *This* was the last straw.

Never had a man of temper been put to a more severe test than he, a few moments later, when the motor car drove into the yard with its owner in sole possession, and Means called out to him imperatively, "I say, young man, fill my tank up with gas, will you, and if you know anything about

machinery see if you can discover what's knocking in the engine."

And never did a man of temper control himself more completely than did Mark, as he stepped outside, and answered evenly, "Very well. How much gasoline dost thou desire?"

"How much? How the devil do I know? Fill up the tank, and see that your arithmetic is accurate. I'll be back for the car in a quarter of an hour." Means slid from his seat and brusquely departed in the direction of Dyer Dexter's General Merchandise store, upon the porch of which Mark could see Faith and little Hope. David had disappeared; the school-house had swallowed him.

Moving somewhat like an automaton, his will a mechanical thing directed by another, Mark began his commanded task. He removed the front seat to get at the opening to the tank, and a leather-covered pocket flask, with silver top and mountings, which had been thrust out of sight between it and the side, fell to the flooring. Surprised, the young man picked it up, and shook it gingerly. It had not been broken, fortunately, and gave forth a liquid sound.

What prompted Mark to examine it further the Saints—or Satan—alone know, but examine it he did, with curiosity. A twist of his fingers and the monogramed top was off it. He carried the bottle to his nose, and sniffed. His nostrils registered a scent which was strange and potent. Cer-

tainly he had never smelled its like before, yet he was sure that it was liquor and surmised that it was whiskey—as, in fact, it was; the best of Bourbon.

Whiskey! It was prohibited by the law of the land; it was a strong drink forbidden by the Book of God; it was accursed, as a particular invention of the Evil One himself, by those of his sect. Finally, its presence indicated that Faith's fears regarding these city strangers, which he had declared groundless, were well founded. If this man should give some of it to Jeremiah to drink, what might not happen! Mark's anger boiled anew. The contents of *this* bottle should not, at least, be the means of tempting him to fall and bring distress to Faith!

Strange, the temptation which that liquor held for the man—and had held for countless hosts of men down through the ages. What was there about it to inflame the senses and grip the soul, making its victims yield up all things else for its sake—wealth, honor, even life? The world-old question; what? Eve with the apple from the tree of knowledge; Pandora with her mysterious casket, whose lid she was forbidden to lift; the temptation to *know*, first hand. Finally, the young Quaker, Mark Gray, with the flask of whiskey.

Mark paused in the act of inverting it. Instinct caused him to glance about. His father's broad back was turned, and no one else was now in sight.



He hesitated, and was lost. A swift movement of his arm, and one swallow of the potent liquor was in his mouth. But not for long! It felt like fire on his tongue; the few drops which ran down his throat seemed to sear it; the fumes rose into his nose and set him to gagging and coughing.

The sound caused the smith to turn and, to his astonishment, he saw Mark rush to the trough and scoop up handful after handful of the murky water and fling it into his wide-opened mouth. What *had* got into the youth now? If he had only known!

Mark's spiritual reaction was as swift as his physical one had been, and there was no cooling water to take the sting from his conscience. He bitterly reviled himself. Temptation was in his case, it seemed, something to be yielded to at once. What had he not done, save commit murder? Then came another flash of resentment against the man who had brought liquor into Content. Mark smiled, but his countenance was grim.

He had dropped the flask. Now he picked it up and poured out the few remaining drops of liquid upon the thirsty earth—a vicarious libation. The dust sucked it up. There, it was gone and the place thereof should know it no more. Going again to the trough, he refilled the flask with water, screwed on its top, and returned it to its place in the car.

## CHAPTER XV

### FRIEND DYER DEXTER IS STARTLED

MR. ROBERT VANDERVETTER MEANS, of Philadelphia, cooled his heels on the porch of the village store, owned by Friend Dyer Dexter, for a good ten minutes before Faith appeared, with little Hope's hand held tightly in her's. The girl's face was almost white, but two crimson spots burned hotly on her cheeks. Her eyelids were downcast, thereby hiding the mist of unshed tears.

For ten minutes she had, with drooped head and clasped hands, been standing and listening to a lecture from him who professed to have taken upon himself the rôle of friendly counselor, since she had no older man to guide her past the danger reefs upon which a young and innocent girl is all too-often wrecked. It seems that she had committed a grievous offense against propriety, especially against Quaker propriety, that morning. Well, Faith had half suspected as much, herself. This was a far, far worse thing she had done than ever she had done before, although the village had found cause to comment upon her undue friendliness with one who had long merited, and was now about to receive, the serious consideration of the

Society in Monthly Meeting . . . yea, Mark Gray, a light youth, with evil propensities which must be sternly dealt with, lest they infect the other youth of the village. It was at this point that the two red spots had appeared on Faith's cheeks.

He, Dyer Dexter, had been greatly grieved and pained to observe her . . . er . . . more than occasional lapses from that which was seemly in Quaker maidenhood, the more so because he cherished towards her a feeling of brotherly love—as was only right and proper in one who was her closest neighbor, and who knew the difficulties under which she had struggled.

Indeed, he had for some time been seriously considering something which might alike make life less arduous and less dangerous for her, and he would that very evening call at her homestead to discuss the matter with her, about seven o'clock.

In conclusion, what did she desire at the store, this morning?

Faith had been speechless for an instant; something was choking her throat. At length she had managed to stammer, "I . . . I have forgotten, Friend Dyer."

"Nay, thou cantht not have forgotten, thithter Faith," Hope had corrected. "It wath to thee if he had thome blue ribbon—thome *bright* blue ribbon—for my hair."

"Sister Faith, surely thou knowest that I carry no ribbon of such a hue, with which one might

bedeck herself in a manner unbecoming to one of our sect, which frowns upon adornment of the body, whereby the mind is drawn from the contemplation of spiritual things to the vanities of this world. Thou shouldst be more careful not to encourage, by so much as a suggestion, the childish mind in frivolous ideas and the vain pursuit of earthly pleasure. *My children . . .*"

"I . . . I thank thee, Friend Dyer," Faith had said, and almost run from his austere presence.

"So, here we are, again. And now, I suppose, 'to market, to market to buy a fat pig, then home again, home again' . . . not exactly 'jiggety-jig' in that car of mine," exclaimed Means, removing his cap and showing his even white teeth in a friendly smile.

"Nay. I am afraid not. I am sorry, but . . . I . . . I . . . cannot ride home with thee." Her response came in little more than a whisper.

"Not ride home? But why, Miss Franklyn? I am going right back. . . ."

"*Please!* Oh, I cannot; and I cannot explain nor tell thee how very sorry . . . and ashamed I am. Please forgive me." With sun-bonneted head bowed lower still, in an endeavor to conceal her distress, Faith hurried past him down the steps, and left him standing bare-headed and staring in blank astonishment. But not for long. He turned with a scowl at the virtuous figure of Dyer Dexter,



which he could dimly see behind his counter. Means was no fool; he might be a frivoler but he could add two and two and reach the correct result.

Thrusting his hands into his pockets he strode sulkily back to the smithy and vented his spleen on Mark. "*Three dollars* for ten gallons of that stuff? Almost thou dost persuade me to become a . . . Quaker! It's plain to be seen that our country cousins can give cards and spades to city profiteers."

"The sign saith thirty cents a gallon," Mark answered, mildly.

"All right. Live and learn—but it'll be a cold day before I buy any more gas here! I'll drive ten miles to the next dump first."

Smiling, Mark watched him depart, although the harsh grinding of gears, as the other angrily jerked the gear-lever over, grated upon him. He loved a motor. But he had witnessed the little drama on the store porch, rightly interpreted the significance of the pantomime, and was glad. He smiled again as the car passed Faith without pausing, and she averted her head. There was *some* balm in Gilead.

It was Mr. Robert Vandervetter Means' turn to be angry, and be it said—to his credit—that his anger was fully as much on account of the girl as himself. She had gone into the store grateful to him, and certainly with every intention of return-

ing home in the machine. She had remained ten minutes and come out empty handed, and wearing the visible marks of shame.

"Damn that dried up old fossil," he muttered. "What business is it of his, and what right has he got to presume to instruct her in what she shall and shall not do, I'd like to know? Now, to save her face, I suppose, she's got to walk all the way home and carry a heavy basket."

The thought actually bred a germ of pity for Faith, and pity is a dangerous thing. So, too, is the denial of something which a spoiled child covets for the moment; and Means was just that, despite his thirty years. If the girl had driven back with him the matter might well have had its ending there, for, aside from her sweetness of face, there was really very little in this child of the country likely to attract a man of his caliber for long. He could not appreciate the sort of qualities which she possessed in full measure and which made her nature so fine and so strong beneath its exterior of Quaker quaintness. But denial always inflames desire—and of what earthly use are after "ifs?"

Means had been merely doing her a kindly favor—at least he quickly convinced himself that such was the fact—and, as his wrath against Dexter for his interference mounted, his nerves, already badly frayed by abuse, began to go to pieces. They clamored for an artificial soporific, and he stopped the machine by the roadside and thrust his hand

down between the cushion and the side. It found the flask. Means unscrewed its silver top and took a big swallow of its contents. His next movement was involuntary; the water was sprayed from his mouth and the flask sailed across the road and into a clump of bushes. A burst of profanity followed it.

The remaining distance to the Franklyn homestead he made in close to a minute and a half. The driveway gate was partially open and, scarcely diminishing his speed, he swung about and into it. The latch inflicted a deep scratch along the glistening enamel of the tonneau, but he was heedless of the fact.

With his patience rapidly ebbing to low tide, Jack Hibbard sat in the opening to the tent, the surveying instruments ready at his side. His face was dark with scowls and he puffed rapidly at an old briar pipe. Bob Means had the social graces to make him a delightful city companion when he was in the mood to be friendly, but as a sole comrade on a camping and working trip he promised badly. Well, there he was, at last! Hibbard brightened a little, but his heart fell as he observed the manner in which the other was driving the car up the rut-filled country cart path. He must be crazy! The machine came to a stop, and Means sprang from it, looking murderous.

Hibbard tried to speak lightly. "Quick work, old man," he said.

"Great joke, wasn't it? Damned funny!" snarled the other.

Hibbard regarded him with open-mouthed astonishment.

"Oh, there is no need of your registering injured innocence, or looking like a half-wit. What did you do with the twelve-dollar-a-quart Bourbon that was in that flask?"

"'Bourbon?' 'Flask?'" repeated the accused man, mechanically.

"You know what I'm referring to, well enough—the flask that I had in the machine. You poured out the whiskey and filled it up with ditch-water, by the taste of it, and a scurvy sort of a joke *I* call it."

"So would I; if I'd done it. Although I did object to your bringing it," retorted Hibbard, with some heat on his own part.

"You . . . you *didn't* do it? If you're lying out of it . . ." He took another step forward, and clinched his hands.

"I did not! You're talking and acting like a fool, Bob, though I don't know yet exactly what it's all about. But if somebody substituted water for the whiskey in your flask it certainly was not I, and . . ."

"Then I know who did do it . . . of course it must have been he, confound his sneaking Quaker soul to the depths of perdition!"

"Who? What are you driving at, now?"



"That fellow who works at the garage, or the smithy or whatever it is—the overgrown cub they call Mark somebody. I ordered him to fill the tank with gas, and the flask was tucked in beside the cushion on the front seat. I'm going to drive back there this instant and give him . . ."

"You're going to do nothing of the sort. Come, man, get a grip on yourself. If you were crazy enough to pitch into him he'd simply knock the stuffing out of you—he's a young giant and as strong as a bull; *the* Bull said so, himself."

"Well, he's a common thief and the law . . ."

"‘The law,’ indeed! Where do *you* fit into the law, I'd like to know—carting around boot-legged booze? You haven't a leg to stand on, and it serves you jolly well right for bringing the stuff. You promised to cut it out, anyway, and I'm glad that it's gone," concluded Hibbard with real feeling.

"Thanks, awfully, both for your sympathy and highly moral lecture!" Means had cooled down a little, and his somewhat habitual biting sarcasm had taken the place of his raging speech. "As it happens, it was only a minor loss, as I have a couple of bottles more in my grip, and if the knowledge of that interesting fact disturbs you, I'm sufficiently recompensed. I tell you this so that I may add the mild suggestion that—for your own health's sake—you leave it strictly alone."

"Don't worry, I shall; in every sense of the word. Oh, thunder! What's the use of our getting into a

school-boy quarrel like this, the first day out? If it gives you any real pleasure to drink yourself to death on smuggled booze, go ahead; it's none of my business. But please try to use a little judgment while you're with me, and do it like a gentleman. If you keep flying off the handle like this, and likewise persist in chasing after every good-looking Quaker girl—I saw you pick Miss Franklyn up in the machine, and it was darned poor business—you'll end by getting both of us into a peck of trouble. Don't be an ass, Bob; for heaven's sake don't!

“And now, let's forget it, and get to work. What you need to restore your lost mental and spiritual perspective and straighten out your nerves is just what the Bull said—fresh air, fresh water, and physical exercise. Come on.”

“Perhaps you are right, Jack; I guess you are,” answered Means more calmly. “I did fly off, a bit—the thing got my goat—and . . . well, I apologize.” He offered his hand and Hibbard took it, gladly. “Fact is, my nerves are a bit on edge, I've been hitting a fairly fast pace for a while. Yep, I deserved the call down, and I'll endeavor to walk the straight and narrow while I'm your guest, anyway. You're not a bad scout, Jack.”

“Let it go at that; I so rarely get a compliment that I don't want that one spoiled. 'Nough said. Here, you can tote this stick—make believe that it's a trout rod, if you like; I'll lug the transit and the

rest of the stuff. They have already pegged out a survey to the town line. Come along."

With Hibbard in the lead they struck off across the fields, which undulated like long ocean swells, rich green and flecked with the tinted white spume of daisy and clover blossoms. The engineer quickly forgot the recent past, and his blue eyes sparkled with a back-to-nature delight as he viewed the peaceful scene, and took deep breaths of the undefiled air with relish.

"Too bad that so idyllic a pastoral as this has got to be spoiled by the raucous note of an engine's whistle and the rumble of wheels on iron rails," he finally remarked. "Of course it's one of the many sad penalties of progress, like that ugly gash there on the landscape. Still, the world must have its highways, and their builders must get the material for them where they can." He pointed to a glaring gravel pit in one of the hillsides ahead.

As Means' eyes turned upon the spot his face lost some of its moody look. "No, it's not a thing of beauty, but we may get some harmless joy out of it, for it's just the place for an impromptu revolver range. You may remember that I challenged you to a test of skill during some of our playtimes—your army-trained hand against my privately-instructed ability."

"I had an idea that you were joking, and haven't given it a second thought, Bob. I never carry a gatling gun when I'm out in the field."



"That makes no never mind, old top. I brought along a brace of the smoothest shooting irons you ever saw—picked them up in Switzerland, and they are as mechanically perfect as a Swiss watch."

"All right. I'm more or less of a dub, but I'm game. We'll try them out after supper."

It was exactly seven-fifteen. Friend Dyer Dexter was departing from the Franklyn farmhouse and his cold, pale face was not pleasant to look upon, for his thin lips were closely pressed together and his eyes held an angry glint. Nevertheless, when he turned to say farewell to Faith, who had accompanied him to the door, his voice was even and passionless.

"I know that it is ever the habit of youth to make hasty decision—decisions which are oft repented of later. I bear thee no ill will for what thou hast said this evening, Sister Faith—I hope that I am too good a Christian for that. Moreover my offer stands. Shouldst thou ever feel that thou hast need of me, I shall gladly do my duty towards thee, and thou wouldst not be the loser by marrying me, for I can offer thee and thy dependents a comfortable home and freedom from the worry which poverty inflicts upon the mind."

"I can only say, again, that I thank thee, Friend Dyer. And I appreciate thy goodness," answered the girl, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Yea," he continued, in a monotone, "My house



shall be a place of refuge for thee and thine against the cold winds of this world, whensoever thou wilt. But I am bound in duty to myself to make one slight condition—that thou hereafter deporteth thyself with a little more circumspection. ‘Cæsar’s wife should be above reproach,’ as a certain licentious versifier once wrote, and so should the wife of Dyer Dexter.”

“I think that I do not quite understand.” Faith’s large eyes had suddenly changed from deep brown to black, flecked with cold flashes like jet.

“Verily I think that thou dost, Sister Faith. City strangers with motor cars are things for the strictest avoidance; and even a Quaker village occasionally produces a youth in whom the spirit of evil predominates, and who should be shunned like a pestilence lest thou, too, becomest infected or thy reputation suffer.”

“Thou meanest . . . Mark Gray?”

“None other. That youth wilt not be long in Content, if my voice hath any weight at the Monthly Meeting.”

“I bid thee good-night,” said Faith, with ominous quiet. As she closed the door behind her, two revolver shots rang out on the still air, and Dyer Dexter started violently.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE VISITOR

As it happened, Friend Dyer Dexter need have felt no alarm because of the shots which rang out so startlingly on the calm air of that spring twilight. Nor need Mark Gray have started so in his more distant home. He sank back in his chair at once, with countenance imperturbed although his pulses were throbbing, and thereupon the smith, who had both heard and seen, bowed his head in silent prayer of thanksgiving. For they were merely the sounds from revolvers discharged in friendly target practice at the gravel pit, and Content was, during the following week, to hear many more of them in the early evening-tide.

Their cause became speedily known, and then the dwellers in the valley had plenty to say on the subject of the visitors' wanton waste of money in the pursuit of an amusement which was certainly frivolous and close kin to wickedness—since fire-arms were essentially things designed for battle, murder and sudden death. Children were strictly enjoined against going near the spot, but David Franklyn was not always obedient and slipped away on more than one night to lie flat upon his stomach in the grass which topped the gravelly embankment, view-

ing the forbidden sight with delightful tremors, wholly unaware of possible danger. And even if Faith had known the fact she would doubtless have been more concerned about his moral than his physical peril.

With the exception of these sounds, like baby thunder-claps from a clear sky, a peaceful silence brooded over the valley. Within and without, Content was enjoying again its customary calm; it was a lull before the storm. The two strangers had been accepted and were tolerated as necessary evils. Few fancied Mr. Means, but Hibbard's frank and friendly advances were met in kind and Mark had struck up a pleasant friendship with him. To be sure, his presence presaged future evil, for no one wanted the railroad, that industrial octopus which was thrusting a steel tentacle tentatively into their smiling valley; but now its coming was inevitable, and *he* was not to blame. And, finally, the village's chief cause of concern was at length on model behavior. The judgment of the coming Monthly Meeting hung like a sword of Damocles over Mark Gray's contrite head, but the thought of this unpleasant fact and the subconscious desire to mitigate the decision's severity was not the moving impulse in his mind.

Mark was at last utterly and stubbornly determined to conquer Self. He would win the victory over his impulses; he *would*! Partly in self-imposed penance for past sins, partly as a daily re-

newed test of his will-power, he kept strictly away from the Franklyn farm. It cost him a tremendous effort. There were evenings—when he had gone early to his simple bedroom, and the birds were twittering their final love-calls outside his window, and the frogs and crickets were tuning up their nocturnal orchestra, and the winds were breathing soft *chansons d'amour*—when it seemed to him that he could remain away from her no longer. As he rested his hands on the window sill and strained his eyes towards her distant home, a mere blurred spot on the hillside, his soul longed, his heart cried out for her; his arms trembled with desire to know the feeling of her body within their close embrace. His thoughts leaped the intervening miles—perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they joined their invisible waves with hers, halfway between. Then determination would contend with desire, and overcome it, and Mark would turn to the Psalms for consolation.

Faith, for her part, sensed the battle which was being waged in his soul, but that did not prevent her from feeling something of womanly pique, mingled with her pain on his behalf. Why did he not come to her? Surely he needed her; she could share of her strength with him, would gladly give it in full measure, and he stubbornly refused to accept it. It was not fair; he could not love as she did, or he would not reject the offering which he must know she longed to bestow. Did he mis-



trust her, think that, because he had again fallen from grace after his promise, she would not forgive—yea, seventy times seven times?

It was, in truth, a period of anguish for Faith. She was drinking deep of a cup wherein were mingled many bitter potions. Trouble is ever born twins—or triplets. It was not enough that she had Mark constantly upon her mind. Poverty was pressing, even as Dyer Dexter had bluntly said. The spring crops were almost a failure. Cut worms had fallen like an army of destruction upon the trenches of the early peas, and left ruin behind them. Rust blight had completed the devastation. Dry rot was attacking the second planting and the young beans and beets. She had not the least intention of accepting Dexter's proposal, but the thought that what he had offered her—freedom from one sort of worry and more with which to do for the children—would go with her "yea," continually troubled her.

Finally, Robert Means gave her cause for further worry, for he intruded upon her daily, always finding some occasion for seeking her in the garden or yard. The campers' need of fresh vegetables was enough. Faith could not think of any reasonable excuse for stopping his neighborly calls, and his attitude towards her was always irreproachable—courteous and entertaining, alike. It was surprising how entertaining he could be. Casually, and in his off-hand manner, he drew word-pictures

of far-off places for her, mere sketchy suggestions, conveyed with a deft verbal touch, but she could not help but be interested by them and half look forward to his next visit. It was all so new, something wholly outside of her experiences which had been circumscribed within the narrowest limits. But with her pleasurable anticipation of each succeeding call came worry, hand in hand. Friend Dyer's warning had angered her, but she knew that it was predicated upon common sense. Her neighbors, should they see her and the city stranger in frequent conversation, would certainly be aghast, and Mark . . . ! Always her thoughts came back to Mark, and many a night she returned to the bedside of David and little Hope to kiss them again, passionately, and—more than once to moisten their thin pillows with a tear which would fall, against her will.

“Why dost thou kiss me like that, sister Faith?” the boy would demand. “Thou hast already done it once, to-night.”

As for Robert Vandervetter Means, it would be somewhat difficult to classify his thoughts, at this time. Certainly the girl held a strong temporary fascination for him, as was not unnatural under the circumstances. He was an epicure, rather than a gourmand, in sensual enjoyments. Paint and powder had palled on him. The fresh bloom of her natural complexion was a stimulus

to his jaded appetite. Her simplicity was as a cooling breeze to one flushed with excesses, yet it also fanned the tiny flame which had been kindled in him by her rebuff. He found himself quite thoroughly enjoying the game of drawing her out and analyzing her, the more because each was so difficult. Utterly lacking any key with which to unlock the treasure-chamber of her soul and so disclose the unalloyed riches stored within it, he thought that her natural sweet reserve must be a cloak consciously worn to cover something, he did not know exactly what. And he wanted to find out. A new type of woman was to him for a moment just as interesting as a new specimen of flora to the naturalist.

At the start this was his only real interest in her—this and the instinctive appeal of “the chase.” “Not much of a chase, at that,” thought Means one night, as he lay awake on his uncomfortable cot and fell into introspection—a pass-time to which he was altogether too much given, at intervals. “She’s like a gentle, brown-eyed fawn which, being unacquainted with danger, lets the hunter stroll up and . . . well, not ‘pat her,’ exactly, but at least hold converse with her. Wasn’t it in ‘Alice Through the Looking-Glass’ that the fawn talked, in the Enchanted Forest? I feel a bit like Alice, myself. Life’s certainly ‘contrary-wise, nohow,’ here.”

But as the days slipped by, bringing alternating



periods of desperate boredom and healthful relaxation; as his nerves, long screwed to a high tension, slowly yielded to Content's calm atmosphere, Means began to think more seriously of the girl. Indeed, he thought more seriously than he had in years. He tried to analyze and explain her growing appeal for him, and could not. Certainly it was not her face, lovely as that really was, for he had seen her only in her customary composure and he much preferred an animated countenance, along with wit which could almost match his own sparkling duel. There was nothing subtle or dazzling about her, not even a suggestion of it, but after all, he thought, occasionally the charm that is inherent in true simplicity is virgin gold and long enduring, while that of artificiality is a thin wash which quickly rubs off. But the next moment he would be telling himself, in exasperation, "You're a fool, Bob Means—approaching second childhood. Why, a girl like that would bore you to death inside of a week!"

But would she? There was a spark of manhood left alive in him, and there were rare moments when he felt the burn of it in his conscience and rather bitterly repented his wasted life. Means had intellect and education, and no finely bred being can ever wholly banish serious reflections of this nature, especially during the sleepless watches of the night. If a woman like this young Quakeress—if Faith Franklyn herself—would stretch



forth a helping hand to him, he might gain a new grasp on the worth-while things of life and save his soul.

Thus the week wore on. Friday afternoon came, and Hibbard declared for an early cessation of their labors, as he wished to walk to the village and use the only telephone which it boasted to call up his superiors regarding a slight difficulty that had arisen. Dexter was the difficulty, it may be said in passing. A particularly moody spell had fallen upon his companion that afternoon, and he secretly rejoiced when Means refused to accompany him. The latter returned to their tent, entered it, and remained there for some time. When he came out his face was flushed beneath its newly acquired tan, and his eyes were heavy-lidded.

He strolled over to the near-by farmhouse, where he had seen Faith working in her little flower garden. She managed to welcome him with a demure smile. It was somewhat forced, for she would have chosen to remain with her thoughts, two miles distant. She, too, was flushed of cheek, but only from the healthful stimulants of sun, air, and exercise. Her hands were covered with damp, rich loam and a little streak of the same mother earth decorated her temple, where she had thoughtlessly pushed back a straying tendril of her hair. It detracted from the precision of her appearance,

and added a natural touch which was utterly fascinating.

There was a goodly share of artistic appreciation in Means' make-up, and it stirred to the picture which she made, standing there in an unstudied pose, a child of nature. His heart, too, already artificially warmed, pulsed more rapidly at her near presence. As the picture attracted the artist, the living woman attracted the man.

He greeted her pleasantly, and although his speech lacked something of its natural crispness, he remained far enough away from her so that she did not suspect the truth, and the thought flashed through her sympathetic mind that he was not quite well. The same sympathy crept into her words, as she replied, "I thank thee, I am very well, as always—but thou appearest flushed and weary. Hast thou, perchance, been laboring too hard in the hot sun?"

He laughed a little, but took his cue from her solicitous question. "Perhaps. Anyway I am tired, lonely—and inordinately thirsty."

"If thou wilt rest thyself upon the little bench under the elm I will gladly fetch thee some cold water from the well," she answered.

Means complied, and lolled back, hands in his pockets, pleased to be waited upon by so fair a Hebe. In truth, every man is something of a god in his own estimation. Faith drew up a bucketful of the sparkling water, her lithe body bending

sinuously as she turned the crank, poured some of it over her hands to wash off the earth, and then filled the rusty tin dipper nearly to the brim. This she brought him, and he drank deeply and with unfeigned relish.

“By Jove, there really isn’t anything better, is there?” he exclaimed.

“Nay. I sometimes drink tea, in moderation, but nothing quencheth the thirst as pure cold water doth. Why, what is the matter?”

Means had abruptly dropped his fevered head between his hands. There was a throbbing ache in it, and a surge of tempestuous thoughts.

“Thy head acheth? Thou art really ill?” Almost unconscious of her act, Faith yielded to a womanly impulse and laid her cool, moist hand upon his burning brow. The man covered it with both of his, and pressed hard. Such a little thing: merely the touch of a woman’s hand upon his head, laid there in friendly pity, yet so potent of good . . . or evil! The boundary between the two is often no more than a shadow line; evil is seldom solid black—or good, pure white—in this world. Means could not have said on which side of the almost invisible line of demarcation his thoughts fell.

“Faith Franklyn, you are an angel clothed in mortality,” he whispered.

The startled girl attempted to withdraw her hand, but he held it more closely still. This was

almost sacrilege. Mark had so held her hand and used almost the same phrase in declaring his love for her, and that was sacred to her.

"Nay . . ." she began, trembling a little.

"You are, Faith—a ministering angel and my guardian angel as well, I honestly believe." First the touch of her hand, unconsidered but nevertheless caressing, then her struggle to free it, had loosed the final bounds of a growing passion. He sprang to his feet, encircled her waist with one arm, and attempted to draw her close.

Shuddering, Faith exerted all her young strength and broke loose from him. Her neck and cheeks were stained crimson, her eyes were big and sparkling black, her breast rose and fell quickly. She would have run into the house if David, Hope, and Jeremiah with them, had not at that instant appeared around the corner of the barn. The boy was, as always, in advance, and now he paused and frankly scowled at Means. The man had presented him with several little gifts and tried to win his friendship without avail.

Jeremiah, however, gave him a gaping smile as soon as he was close enough for his near-sighted eyes to recognize the caller, and likewise a broad wink. The farm hand frequently strolled over to the camp and split firewood for them, and more than once he had made the acquaintance of Means' whiskey—against the objection of Hibbard. Fortunately, Faith had not yet learned of the fact, nor did she



see the visible evidence of this bond between the two men of widely different stations. Perhaps fortunately, likewise, Jeremiah was much too near-sighted to see the look of anger and distress upon the girl's countenance, for even his none too keen intellect might have surmised the truth, and he worshiped the ground on which she trod.

Vexed by this interruption, yet half relieved that he had been saved from making a complete fool of himself, Means started away, after first thanking the girl for her kindness in a manner which was at once humble and courteous. As he passed Jeremiah he remarked, "If Miss Franklyn can spare you for a few minutes this evening I wish that you would come over and cut a little more kindling for us. I told Mr. Hibbard that I would do it, but I'm not altogether well, and extremely tired—in fact . . ." he passed his hand across his brow ". . . I hardly know what I am doing." The sentence was, of course, meant rather for the ears of Faith than those of the farm hand.

"Sure. Count on me. Danged if I ain't the best kindlin' chopper in Content, and there are some here that can split hairs, at that. No objection to my goin' now, is there, Faith?" demanded Jeremiah, turning to his young mistress.

Somewhat uncertainly she nodded her permission and the ill-assorted pair moved off together. David watched them go. Then he thrust his hand, soiled with weeding, into Faith's and remarked with

childhood's frankness, "I wish that that man'd go *way* away, sister Faith."

"So do I, David boy."

Hibbard had paused for a moment at the smithy, on his way home.

"You're working too hard, Mark," he announced in parting. "A young fellow like you should not be getting pale around the gills. You know what all work and no play does to a man as well as boy! Better knock off early to-morrow—it's Saturday—and take a tramp with me. You know the country better than I do and could be of real help to me, besides being a somewhat pleasanter companion than Bob Means has been of late. What do you say?"

"If father hath no objections I will say 'yea,' gladly," answered Mark, inwardly much pleased at the frank invitation.

"Assuredly I have none. It will do the lad good, as thou hast said, Friend," the smith replied. "I have respect for thee and Mark will be safe and in good company."

If he had but known!

## CHAPTER XVII

### MARKSMEN

“ART thou not going to stop thy work, and join Friend Hibbard as he requested thee, Mark?” inquired the smith, on the following afternoon.

“Presently, father. I dislike to leave a task half-completed. ‘Business first, pleasure afterwards,’ is a good motto, I think.”

“Of a verity it is, my son, and it pleaseth me to hear thee make it thine own. I may say, too, that I am well pleased with the way thou hast conducted thyself this week; thou hast labored right diligently and acted with circumspection in all things.”

The pleasure which Mark felt at hearing these words of unexpected and unusual commendation from his father’s lips showed in his own voice, as he haltingly replied, “Nay, do not praise me. I deserve . . .”

“Thou deservest, as all mankind deserves, honest appreciation for honest effort. I am not one of those who hold that faults should be criticized and virtues ignored. Fulsom flattery is a bad thing, but sincere praise a stimulus to further endeavor, although thine own consciousness that thou hast done well outweighs it.

"There was truth in what thy new friend said, yester-even. Thou appearest pale and drawn, but I know that it is rather from worry, than work. Continue to walk uprightly and thou needest fear no evil. I have some influence with the Monthly Meeting and thine own recent behavior will have more. Others than I have been watching thee, my son."

Mark attempted a bit of bravado. "If thou art satisfied, I care little what they say."

"Nay, thou dost not mean that. A fair reputation is a jewel with which all may properly adorn themselves—those of our faith especially. But tell me, my boy, is there not the thought of something—or some one—else, disturbing thy mind?"

Mark glanced quickly up. "Yea," he answered, involuntarily.

"Is it . . . Sister Faith?"

"Father! Thou knowest?" A light leaped into the young man's eyes, and those of the smith twinkled a little. "Youth will always think that age knows nothing of the love of a man for a maid, or that it has lost remembrance of it amid the shadows of the past. It is not so, my son. We have our memories, at least." He paused. Mark laid down the iron which he was shaping and drew a step nearer.

"Mother," he breathed. "She was very dear, was she not?"



"One of God's own . . . too good for this world."

"How often I have wished that she might have lived! Not only because I know that I have missed something precious, but because I feel that she would have . . . have understood, as none other could. Thou hast been very patient with my shortcomings, but if I had had the comfort and inspiration of a mother's love . . ."

"I know. Thou dost not remember her at all?"

"Nay. At least, I suppose that I do not, actually, yet at times I have a vivid dream as though . . ."

Mark turned away. There was a mist in his eyes which he felt must be unmanly, and the story of his dream too childish for a man to tell. A brief silence ensued, during which each was busy with his own thoughts. Then the smith said, "Faith is not altogether unlike her. I have a deep affection for her; she is a sweet girl and would be a good influence for thee. Hast thou spoken to her of thy feelings?"

"She knoweth, and . . . Oh, I cannot accept what she might be willing to give. I am not worthy; sometimes I doubt if I ever shall be."

"The love of a true woman is like the love of God, and each is as a driven well whose pure waters can both cleanse, and quench the thirst. If we neglect any of them they will in time cease to flow for our use, although the water is still within the rock, but the more we draw upon it the more

it will flow forth, an inexhaustible stream. If I were thee I would not keep wholly away from her in thine hour of need. I have confidence in thee, my son. The spirit of thy mother and the love of the girl should be as lights to guide thy feet through the darkness."

Mark lifted his head, resolutely. "I mean that they shall be. I shall finish my tramp this afternoon by visiting her."

A little while later he was swinging blithely down the broad highway, his steps in time with the hymn-tune which he was whistling. There was no set music in the Friends' meetings, but often some one would be moved by the Spirit to start a hymn, instead of praying, or reading from the gospels, and Mark knew and loved all of the old familiar tunes. The man's soul was as full of melody as a lark's.

His music was suddenly interrupted by the crack of two pistols, a little distance to the left. Mark stopped in his tracks, and smiled, and frowned simultaneously. Of course it was merely Means and Hibbard at their foolish, wasteful pastime. Then the latter must be at the gravel pit.

Again the staccato sounds shattered the stillness.

He felt his heart beating faster, and his thoughts went back to the mercifully ended days when War was raging overseas, and he had secretly yearned to be in it all, often wickedly imagining himself a

hero in the midst of the bloody fighting. "I'm nearly twenty-two," he thought. "Yet how little I really know of life! 'Battle, murder, sudden death!' Millions of men of my age know them intimately, and to me they are only names. . . . I suppose I should say, 'thank God.' Why, I've never so much as seen a gun fired, much less held one in my hands. I wonder what it would feel like to hold a weapon capable of dealing death afar off?"

Mark glanced down at the big fingers of his right hand and saw them curling up as though about the butt of an imaginary revolver. He lifted his arm, and sighted along the invisible barrel at a robin which was gayly teetering up and down on the end of the branch of a wayside bush.

*Crack!* A shot rang out, and the bird flew. "Missed," laughed the youth. "Thou hast no need to worry, birdling. If I had been holding a real pistol I should assuredly not have aimed it at thee."

His eyes turned in the direction of the gravel pit. "I believe that I will go past it and let Friend Hibbard know that I have come at last," thought he. It was a perfectly reasonable excuse for his sudden determination to visit the spot and see for himself what was happening there.

Mark's head appeared above the rim of the pit just as Means was delicately increasing the pull on the trigger with his slender fore-finger.

*Crack!*

"Damnation!" ejaculated the city man, throwing the revolver to the ground in a sudden burst of rage. "Haven't you country bumpkins any more sense than to stick your heads up just over a target? I don't know as I would have been so devilish sorry if I had slipped and put a bullet into you—it might have taught you a lesson. That shot doesn't count in my string, Hib. The fellow spoiled my aim," he added, addressing his friend.

"Suit yourself." Hibbard's voice indicated his disgust. Means had been a poor companion, all day, and after they had knocked off work had taken just enough drinks to make him quarrelsome and insistent that they engage in revolver competition for a while. To humor him into better nature Hibbard had agreed to shoot until Mark should arrive.

"There's scarcely any need of quibbling, though—you've already got me beaten to a fare-ye-well. I can't shoot against you, and you know it. I'm a dub, and you're betting on a sure thing. Want to try your luck at the game, Mark?" he called cheerfully up.

"Nay, I thank thee, Friend. I do not use warlike weapons."

"Well, neither do I, now—as I've been remarking. And to-day I couldn't hit the broadside of a barn door. Come on down and see how it seems."

Mark took one ill-considered step forward, obeying inclination. Then he would have checked him-



self, but it was too late. Another pitfall had been dug for him. He had placed his weight upon an out-jutting bit of turf, which caved in and precipitated him down the steep bank in a small avalanche of loose gravel. The look of foolish surprise on his face brought a smile to Means' lips. Hibbard frankly roared, and Mark laughed with him as he scrambled to his feet.

"I was about to say, 'nay,' a second time," he announced. "But here I am."

"Right. I'll say you are. Your sudden arrival reminds me of a limerick which runs . . . I'm not sure of the words, but it's something like this! 'I can't see you now, Mr. Brown; I'm just out of my bath,' called Miss Drowne. He replied, 'Never mind, just slip on what you find.' So she slipped on the stairs and came down.' "

Mark could not resist the impulse to smile, but he felt that his face flushed. He did not lack imagination.

"You quoted it all wrong," remarked Means, in a petulant tone.

"I suppose so: everything that I do to-day seems to be wrong, from your standpoint, Bob." From Hibbard's somewhat sharp reply, Mark drew the conclusion that all was not running smoothly between the two visitors, and he rightly guessed the reason, or one of them; for Means' face was flushed again, and his breath pungent. The whiff which he had caught of it sent his memory winging back to

the flask in the automobile, and something told him that the other's scowling glance towards him had a similar inception. Hibbard, too, felt the electric charge in the atmosphere and realized that he had blundered in inviting Mark to join them. With the hope of creating a temporary diversion, he hastened to add, lightly, "Well, now that you *are* here, try your luck. Here's my revolver. . . ."

"Your's?" sarcastically demanded Means.

"Oh, thunder, Bob, what's got into you, to-day? Of course if you have any objection to his shooting it once . . ."

"I? Not in the least," the other answered, with airy politeness. "I should be delighted to receive a lesson in Quaker marksmanship from him, so long as he doesn't shoot me."

"Well, *I* haven't done it—yet; and Mark would have to be a mighty poor marksman to be any worse than I am this afternoon."

"Which would certainly be the case, were I to try it," broke in the youth. "I have never even held a weapon in my hand."

"You have, now." Hibbard thrust the pearl-handled pistol into Mark's grasp, and his fingers had closed almost tenderly about it before he was fully aware of the fact. He knew that he should surrender it at once, but its owner's attitude—while making such surrender the more imperative—was like a challenge. The suggestion that he could not do something which this dweller in the city could

do, aroused his antagonism. In addition, a very strange sensation was stealing over him, body and mind. The pistol-butt nestled lovingly in his palm; his hand and it seemed to be as one. He might almost have been born grasping a revolver, so natural did it feel. Shaking his head in perplexity, he repeated, "I have never fired off a pistol in my life."

"Then you can be like Pat, who, when he was asked if he could play the violin—answered, 'I dunno. Sure and I never tried.' "

Hibbard was doing his level best to counteract the hostility waves which permeated the atmosphere about them, and, having drawn a little smile from Mark, turned to Means with a wink, as he added, "The thing is perfectly simple—in theory. All that you have to do is to point the muzzle accurately at the object you want to hit, hold it perfectly still and pull the trigger; this dingbat, here. Then you're practically bound to score a bulls-eye. Understand?"

"Yea, it is simple," responded the Quaker in all seriousness. "What *shall* I hit?"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE QUARREL

“‘WHAT shall I hit?’ ” mocked Means, sardonically. “Did you get the significance of that? Not ‘what shall I aim at,’ but ‘what shall I *hit*?’ How delightfully naïve! If simplicity were money your Quaker friend would be a millionaire, Hib. For the sake of his self-esteem, I suggest that you suggest his hitting the sand bank.”

“Oh, lay off, Bob. You’re devilishly disagreeable, to-day. Don’t let him get your goat, Mark.”

The young man opened his mouth to reply; then changed his mind and closed his lips tightly again. He was inwardly raging, but this time his anger at the stinging sarcasm was not of the volcanic nature customary with him, but set in ice. Apparently he had made a fool of himself, and Hibbard had been but jesting when he said that it was all very simple. The dictates of reason whispered that he had best withdraw, now, admitting his foolishness and that the laugh was on him. But he could not. Means’ mocking gaze forbade it, as did his own stubborn will. He would go through with it now, whatever happened, and trust to God for guidance for his hand. That was it; *trust to God*. Mark found



himself actually and fervently praying that a miracle would happen in his behalf—that his “Quaker simplicity” would be vindicated and not allowed to become a laughing stock.

All these thoughts flashed through his mind simultaneously with Hibbard’s continued words, “Fire at anything you like. Means and I have been endeavoring to kill that innocent wrapping-paper target stuck up against the sand bank in front of you, but . . .”

“But if that looks too easy, you might knock the neck off that dead soldier sitting on the rock,” broke in Means. “I was saving it for a final demonstration of my own poor skill, but I will cheerfully relinquish it to you.”

“‘Dead soldier?’” Mark echoed, in bewilderment.

“Exactly. I am referring to that empty bottle yonder. It once contained some excellent one hundred proof whiskey. I *think* that you know what that is—have, perhaps, made the acquaintance of some from that very bottle,” drawled the other, insultingly, while his eyes narrowed.

“Perhaps . . . I have.” Mark spoke very deliberately. A whiskey bottle! He had prayed to God for aid, as worldly as was the object of his petition, and lo, the target which was offered him was an instrument of the devil. “Very well, I will—at least I shall try,” he said, in even tone.

As deliberately as he had spoken, he raised his

strong right arm, clutching the revolver desperately, and took careful aim at the mark.

"Bet you that he doesn't come within six feet of it, Bob," cried Means. "Ten to one odds on that—five hundred dollars to fifty. Come on, are you backing your youthful protégé?"

"Not to the extent of a week's salary; I guess not! But I'll go you a cigar, even."

"Done! Well, why don't you shoot? Are you waiting for the target to grow?" This to Mark.

To the Quaker's astonishment his hand, always so strong and steady, was trembling. All the muscles of his tensed arm were a-quiver. "This won't do," he thought. "*I have got to hit that bottle . . .* yea, and win Friend Hibbard's wager for him. I must relax, somehow."

Without answering he dropped the weapon to his side. Then, following an inexplicable impulse, he raised it above his head, muzzle pointing upward, brought it down, neither fast nor slowly, and when the tiny sight covered the bottle's neck, pulled the "dingbat" on which his forefinger lightly rested.

*Crack!* Crack! The second sound was like a simultaneous echo of the first as the slender neck flew to pieces. Mark opened his eyes, which had instinctively closed with the shot. He looked before him. The bottle lay upon its side on the flat rock, but the neck was gone.

There was an instant of complete silence. Then Hibbard gave a long, low whistle and followed it

with the exclamation, "I smoke on you, Bob. Some shot!"

Sudden excitement took hold of Mark, and he cried exultantly, "Why, it is even as thou hast said, Friend—it is as easy as pointing one's finger. Now I shall smash the bottom of the accursed thing, thus."

Almost before the words had passed his lips he had repeated his action, and the remainder of the bottle flew into fragments.

"Good Lord, what shooting! An expert couldn't have bettered it, and Mark never had a shooting iron in his hand before in his life! Bob! Did you ever see anything like it?"

In answer to Hibbard's enthusiasm—the man was fairly dancing about and pounding Mark on the back—Means sneered, "It appears that I pasted the label 'Simplicity' on the wrong can, and I apologize to your friend. *You* are the simple one to fall for such arrant nonsense as that. 'Never had a revolver in his hand before!' Huh, tell it to the marines."

Mark's anger had been dissipated by his success. Now the taunter's words came as a mental shock—like a physical blow in the face. For a moment he was more surprised than anything else, and his tone was indicative of his feelings, as he answered, "Nay, but it was the gospel truth."

The other gave a short laugh. "I see. 'That's my story, and I'm going to stick to it,' eh? Well,

I have to hand it to you for being a liar with a most convincing manner. Quakerism must be wonderful training."

"Friends do not lie; nor did I."

"And I say it was a lie, a —— lie!"

"Then it is *thou* that liest!"

Mark's face was strangely white, but his voice was even—as impersonal as the sound of a dueling pistol.

Hibbard laid an intercepting hand on his companion's shoulder, for he knew that drink made him utterly irresponsible; robbed him of all sense of proportion. To no avail. Means, blazing with anger, flung himself away from it and his clenched fist shot out and dealt the young Quaker a resounding smash on the left cheek.

Specks of blood-red fire flashed before Mark's burning eyes. The volcano asleep within his soul seethed as though his whole inner being were a scorching, molten mass. The mad desire to kill possessed him. But, through the tempestuous roaring in his brain, he heard the words as clearly as though a human voice were speaking them to his ears, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other, also."

"Nay, never!" thought he, but even as he denied the command he unconsciously obeyed it. Without hesitating a moment, Means accepted the visible invitation. He was fairly beside himself.

Crack!



This time the sound accompanied the impact of Mark's iron left hand as its open palm struck Means' jaw. It was merely a slap; but such a slap that its victim went to the ground as though he had been felled by a sledge-hammer.

For the space of several seconds none of the three moved. Means lay where he had fallen, both hands pressed against his numbed jaw and smarting cheek. Hibbard stood leaning forward a little and holding his breath. Mark remained like a statue, arm still extended. He was the first to recover himself and he straightened up, allowing his arm to drop to his side. The old revulsion of feeling was surging over him in waves of misery. "Oh," he cried. "Why did I do it? I am sorry, now . . . but when he struck me that second time . . ."

"Sorry, *now*? If you were going to be sorry for teaching him a deserved lesson why, in heaven's name, did you stand there like a wooden Indian, and let him punch you the second time?" demanded Hibbard.

"I . . . I do not know. I . . ."

"He'll be sorry enough, before I'm through with him," Means shouted wildly, as he scrambled to his unsteady feet and spit some saliva flecked with blood from his mouth. His teeth had cut the side of his cheek. "I'll kill the . . ." His unprintable epithet was partly choked off by the restraining arm which Hibbard flung about his neck.

"For God's sake get out, Mark," begged the latter,

as he endeavored to pinion the arms of his raging comrade.

For another instant Mark stood in his tracks, panting. Then he turned and ran—not from the man, but from the devil within himself. He realized that if Means should again attack him he would slay him, bare-handed. Desire still clamored for him to return, and avenge the blow and the deadly insult, but he ran on under the urging of his will, heedless of direction.

He had gone some little distance from the place of the encounter before he permitted himself to slow down from a run to a walk. Then he stopped entirely, the better to regain control of his quivering nerves. For the first time he now became conscious of the fact that the fingers of his left hand were stinging, mightily, and as he flexed and unflexed them he seemed to feel again the impact of that single blow, and his blood leaped anew. At the same instant he realized, with a start, that he was still holding, clutched in his right hand, the revolver which he had been firing. He regarded it with surprise and loathing. The strange fascination which it had exercised over his mind had forced him to touch it and been the initial cause of all the trouble. He wanted to cast the weapon far from him, but of course he must return it to its owner. Not now, however. It must be at a time when both he and Means had grown cooler.

With a little shudder he dropped the sinister thing

into his side pocket. Then he stood, eyes on the ground, a prey to bitter thoughts. An afternoon which had promised so fairly had turned dark and dismal, although the sun still shone in the clear heavens. There seemed to be no help for it, he was apparently fated to sing a crescendo scale of discordant notes.

Into his gloomy reflection broke a clear call—his own name, several times repeated.

At first he was scarcely conscious that he was being addressed, but on the third repetition of the call he lifted his bowed head to find himself close to the split rail fence which enclosed the Franklyn pasture land. In the garden beyond it stood Faith, beckoning to him.

## CHAPTER XIX

### FAITH—COMFORTER

MARK was doubly disturbed. It had been his intention to visit Faith, but after what had just happened he would have preferred to face almost any one else, even Means again. He was disheveled, mind and body were heated, his face still stung and ached from the force of the blows which had been dealt it. His mouth was parched. As he ran his tongue over his dried lips Mark suddenly remembered what his father had said, but an hour before, concerning the love of a true woman and its likeness to the thirst-quenching waters of a pure well. He needed it now, as never before, refreshment and strength to his burning heart.

With new resolve, he climbed the fence, crossed the narrow field and picked his way among the rows of early vegetables, which enabled him to keep his head bent and so, for a little longer, avoid the question that he felt must lie in her look.

But Mark need not have hesitated, as it happened, for the girl's mind was, for the moment, too occupied with a new problem of her own to be



aware of his unnatural appearance. As soon as he had arrived within easy speaking distance, she called to him, "Oh, but I am glad that thou hast come, Mark. Prayers *are* answered. Twice within the hour I have been on the point of sending David for thee, indeed, for I have needed thee."

She had needed him! Upon hearing Faith's frank statement all of his own worries took wing.

Mark hastened the few remaining steps to her side and demanded, anxiously, "What is the matter, Faith. Has something untoward happened? Thou hast been frightened!"

"A little, yea. Although I suppose that it was really foolish of me."

"What is it? Tell me. If there is anything that I can do . . ."

"It hath resulted because of something which the city campers—or one of them—hath done, Mark."

The man felt his nerves begin to creep and his fingers to contract once more. The sting returned to his left hand and sent a thrill of satisfaction to his mind, as it recalled the blow. With an ominous note in his voice, he said, "What hath he done to injure, or to frighten thee?"

Faith responded with an uncertain laugh, intended to reassure him, and her tone was lighter as she answered, "Nay, he hath done nothing . . . that is . . ." she hesitated, unwilling to speak a falsehood, ". . . it is not on mine own account

that I am troubled, to-day, but rather on account of Jeremiah."

"Jeremiah? Why, how should this Means—yea, it is he to whom thou hast referred, I know—how should he have aught to do with him?"

"He . . . the city men have engaged him to split firewood for them during some of his spare moments, with my permission. I could not well refuse it, since I can pay the poor man so little, Mark."

"I understand, but. . . ."

"I am much afraid that it is even as I feared. On returning home Jeremiah hath several times behaved strangely, and this afternoon . . ."

"Means hath been giving him liquor?"

"I am almost sure of it, Mark. I do not believe that he would have obtained it dishonestly. But whether they gave it to him or he . . . he found it, he is even now a victim of his old-time failing."

Faith's distress was so real that Mark was deeply touched by it, and reviled himself anew for having so much as taken a drop from the flask into his mouth. "Oh, what an evil thing it is," she cried. "How can men allow their brains to be so warped by it? He hath been strangely obsessed and yet pitifully amusing, withal, this afternoon." She ended with another nervous laugh.

"What hath he done?"

"The queerest things. I saw him come home

from the camp an hour ago, walking in a manner which brought an ache to my heart. He went to his little room in the barn loft and shortly came out, again, carrying an old gun. I remember his bringing it here when I was a small girl, and my farther forbidding him to keep it—but he must have kept it hidden, somewhere. I went to him, and remonstrated, but he insisted that it was for my sake that he had gotten it out—that he had to protect me no matter what happened to him.”

Faith gave another somewhat tremulous little laugh, but her eyes were sad.

“From whom does he think that he is guarding thee, Faith?” Mark was wondering if Jeremiah had a premonition—born of alcohol—that danger threatened from the hillside where the tent stood. But the girl laughed more naturally, as she answered, “From *Indians*. Thou knowest how full of wild stories he is, which makes him such a favorite with the children. Now his poor mind is dwelling in the days of the pioneers.”

“Where is he?”

“In the west lot—the little pasture. When I last went to speak to him he was lying beneath the truck wagon, and insisted that it was a caravan and that the Indians were on every hillside. He was terribly in earnest, and I have been greatly troubled for fear he will shoot himself—or perhaps a cow, which we could most ill afford to lose—but I cannot make him relinquish the gun to my charge.”

"Of course thou hast been worried—he should be ashamed and doubtless wilt be when he is again sober—but there is probably no danger. I should doubt if the old gun were loaded."

"But it is, Mark—at least it was a little while ago. I heard a tremendous bang and ran to see what had happened. Poor, foolish Jeremiah was jumping about, waving the gun in the air, and as I ran up he cried, 'You may come now, Faith. It's safe. See, I've killed it; I've killed it!' "

"Killed what?" begged Mark.

"His wig!"

" 'His *wig*' ?"

"Even so. Oh, Mark, I should not laugh at him—it is pitiably tragic . . . but it is too funny. I surmise that, heated alike by the liquor and the hot sun, he had removed that atrocious thing of dirty webbing and queer colored hair with which he so vainly covereth his bald head, and placed it on one of the near-by fence posts. Probably he looked up, suddenly, and his near-sighted eyes and befuddled brain distorted it into some ferocious animal, I know not what. And . . . he shot it."

Both of them were now laughing like children.

"Dost thou mean to say that he hit it?"

"Of a verity he did. It is now as full of little holes as my sieve. He can never wear it again, and his heart will be broken."

"It will serve him right," replied Mark, alike serious and censorious. "Fire-arms are things



fraught with danger.” Suddenly he recalled the revolver in his coat pocket. It seemed to grow unbelievably heavy and hot against his side. “I will go and reason with him,” he added.

Together they walked rapidly to the west pasture, and there found the farm hand where Faith had left him, lying in the scant shade furnished by the truck wagon. Beside him was a rusty, double-barreled shot gun, and his particular pet—a small maltese cat—lay stretched out across his thin chest, purring contentedly. The man himself was three-quarters asleep, with his mouth wide open. At the sound of Mark’s voice, sternly addressing him, Jeremiah opened his heavy eyes a little and gave the visitors a hazy smile of recognition and welcome.

“What does this mean? What art thou doing here?” demanded Mark.

The other did not move, except to stroke the cat, uncertainly. In a thick voice he replied, “Shoot’n’. Been a-shoot’n’ sparrers . . . f’r Pat.” He had christened the feline thus when it was a tiny kitten, because of its green eyes, and although it had later seemed wise to change the name to Patricia, she was still “Pat” to him.

With an effort Mark managed to keep his face under control.

“It seemeth to me that this is pretty small business for a grown man,” he answered, in a voice intended to be scathing.

Jeremiah's grin broadened. "Well, she's a pretty small cat."

That ended the conversation as far as he was concerned, and he rolled over on his side and went promptly to sleep. Mark heard a queer, smothered sound behind him and wheeled about, to find Faith with a corner of her house-apron stuffed in her mouth to check her laughter. But her eyes were misty.

He confiscated the shot-gun and, now a walking arsenal, headed back towards the house.

"Drink and weapons of destruction! What a heavy curse the twain have laid upon this world," whispered the girl.

They walked on in silence, and Mark's former distressing thoughts flocked back to settle heavily upon his mind. Should he now make confession of how sadly he, too, had fallen from grace because of them that afternoon, despite his promise to her of better things? Or should he remain silent? The former course would be the more honorable one and might likewise bring some slight relief to his own heart, but it would merely be shifting part of the burden to her's.

The troublesome question was decided for him, and in an unexpected manner. David came running out of the side door, at their approach, and flung himself bodily upon the man, crying, "Oh, Mark, but I am glad to see thee. Hast thou brought a rosy-cheeked apple for me, to-day?"

Without waiting for a reply to his demand, the boy commenced his customary search through Mark's pockets, which often held some little favor for him and for little Hope. His hand was in the side pocket where the revolver lay, before Mark could remember and check him. David drew out the gleaming weapon, and uttered a cry of surprised delight, while Faith gave one of amazement and dismay, and stepped back a pace.

"Oh," she exclaimed, her eyes growing big. "It is a gun—another gun. Mark!"

His heart was in his boots, but he tried to pass the affair off with a laugh and answered in jesting mimicry of Jeremiah's words, "Well, it's a pretty *small* gun."

"A gun! I know, it's just like the ones that the city strangers shoot with, nightly, at the gravel pit," broke in David, and his sister cried, "How didst thou know that? Hast thou not been forbidden . . ."

"I know, sister Faith. I . . . I just happened to be passing by the pit and I could not help looking, just once." Desirous of changing the subject as quickly as possible, the boy readdressed himself to Mark and demanded, eagerly, "Will it shoot? Canst thou make it go *bang*?"

"Yea, David, I suppose that I can. But here is thine apple, son, and one for thy little sister. Take them and run along; I have something to say to Faith."

"It seemeth to me that thou art always saying, 'run along.' I want to stay, Mark, and see thee shoot the gun as the city men do. Please, Mark." He started to sink his even teeth into the apple, but suddenly changed his mind and placed it atop his head. "See, now I am the little boy from whose head William Tell shot the apple in the story-book. Couldst thou do that, Mark?"

The man instinctive raised the revolver, as he had twice before, but dropped it again to his side as Faith sprang forward and clasped his arm, giving a little cry of terror. He laughed, shortly. "Nay, I am assuredly not going to attempt it—although I could hit it well enough." Mark made the statement simply and with no thought of boastfulness. Odd as it was, the thought that he might fail, should he attempt the shot, and perhaps kill the lad whom he loved dearly, never so much as flashed through his mind. His self-confidence was complete; he knew that, although he had never touched a pistol until a half hour previous, he had perfect command over it. No professional marksman who twice daily shoots the cigarette from the lips of his fellow performer could have felt more complete assurance of his ability than Mark at that moment.

He replaced the revolver in his pocket, and David swallowed his disappointment with a big bite of the solacing apple, and trotted off to join his smaller sister on the porch. Something was



the matter with the man who had once been the best playmate in the world. He was not half the fun that he had been!

Faith had stood regarding her visitor with a deepening shadow and a question in her dark eyes. She loved him; therefore she could instinctively sense his varying moods. Now she knew that something of serious moment was troubling his soul, and of course it had to do with the weapon—a strange thing for a Friend to be carrying in his pocket, and doubly strange and dangerous for one of Mark Gray's impulses. But she waited for him to speak, full-well knowing that he would soon tell her in his own way.

"Yea, I have shot the pistol . . . this afternoon; but I shall never fire another." He spoke the last words very slowly, and they cost him a sudden sharp pang. His was a renunciation of something, the keen joy of which had just been made known to him and must never be experienced again. And how the mere "feel" of the butt within his hand had thrilled him! With a look of complete discouragement, a gesture of despair, he turned to her and exclaimed, "Oh, I have failed again, Faith . . . failed most woefully."

The expression of distress upon his countenance was instantly reflected upon her's.

"Tell me, if thou wilt, dear lad. If aught is troubling thy heart let me help thee bear it. I shall understand, for I know how hard thou hast been

trying." Faith spoke gently and led him to the rustic bench beneath the elm, almost as a mother might a child who had erred and come back repenting. There Mark told her all that had happened—all, that is, except the conclusion of the affair and Means' threat. When he had finished his story he dropped his forehead upon his clasped hands in remorse.

The girl started. Here was Mark, sitting just as Means had sat, and upon the same bench. Each had addressed her in almost identical words. Yet how utterly different they were, and how utterly different her feelings towards them! He raised his eyes to her countenance, to behold the condemnation which her continued silence seemed to imply, and he so richly merited. He beheld, instead, an expression of mingled sympathy, love, and anger, yet he felt that the last was not directed towards him. Indeed the girl's emotions, usually hidden with such care behind the calm mask of her kind, had been strongly aroused by his recital, and showed clearly upon her face.

"I sinned, Faith. There is no excuse that I can offer for what I did," said Mark very humbly.

"Perhaps it is true that thou hast sinned, but thou wert strongly tempted."

"That is no excuse."

"Nay, I know. I was for the moment thinking of something else. Dost thou recall what Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Corinthians?

‘God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.’ There is strength and comfort for . . . for us, in that thought, Mark. Only those whose spirits are strong enough to overcome in the end, are permitted to undergo great trials—The Book saith it. And surely strange temptations are ever being placed in thy way. It is a test, Mark; thou art summoned to battle.”

“If thou thinkest so . . .”

“I do, and I believe that this afternoon thou hast won a partial victory over thyself. Thou hast complied with the injunction of the Apostle Matthew, at least, by turning thine other cheek.”

“Now thou art trying to comfort me, and half condoning my fault. I truly complied with the letter, but not with the spirit of the command.”

“If I had been in thy place . . .” the girl began, her eyes flashing.”

“Faith!”

“Nay, I do not know what I should have done if he had struck me thus. Oh, misfortune seems to follow thy footsteps, and my heart acheth for thee, Mark. Thy chief fault to-day, it seemeth to me, was in accepting the pistol in the first place, for well thou knowest that we who bear the name of Friends are strictly forbidden to follow the pursuit of frivolous pastime and commanded to turn

our eyes from things of war. 'He that taketh the sword,' Mark."

"I know. But the impulse was irresistible. I cannot hope to explain it to thee for I cannot understand it myself. It seemed as natural for me to grasp and to fire that revolver as to hold and strike with the blacksmith's hammer. And I felt—I *feel*—as certain of hitting the mark with the one as with the other."

"But why? It seemeth to me like something requiring great skill acquired by long practice. Mr. Hibbard, thou saidst, was in the war and used a weapon often, yet he missed even the larger target."

"I had not thought of that. It seemed entirely easy," responded Mark, with a puzzled note in his voice.

"It is all beyond my simple comprehension. But let us think no more of it. What is done, is done. A past misstep is never mended by worrying about it, but by walking all the more carefully thereafter," said Faith, and added, after a moment's pause, "Mark."

"Yea."

"I am glad that thou hast told me, and brought thy trouble to me."

"I, too, am glad . . . now."

"Always do so. Please, Mark. Thou art still troubled! Wilt thou then treat my orders so lightly?" She smiled, a little wanly; then let her clear eyes look directly into his, as she continued.



“Even Our Lord struggled with temptation for forty days in the wilderness, and surely we cannot hope to overcome it in less. I have faith in thee, still; I shall always have faith in thee.”

He rose to his feet with the light of her great love mirrored on his face. His hand sought her's and he drew her close—almost, but not quite, to his breast. “God be thanked that there are women like thee on earth, to minister and to teach!” he exclaimed. “How can other religious bodies, who take the name of Christ, deny to women the divine right to preach His gospel, when some of them are but a little lower than the angels, and men spiritually so far beneath them? St. Paul was not always inspired. Thou art, indeed; a light to lighten my darkness and guide my feet, even as father said.”

“Thy father? He said that?”

“Yea, this very noontime. He guessed my love for thee, which I was glad to confess, and he approveth of it.”

A deeper color tinted her neck and cheeks. “Oh, I am happy in that thought, Mark. And it should strengthen thee, also. And now I must leave thee to prepare our evening meal. I would like to ask thee to remain, but I fear that it would not be seemly.” She hesitated, and dropped her eyes. “Canst thou . . . canst thou not return this evening and join us in our hour of prayer?”

Mark pressed both her hands fervently.

“*Can* I? My dear one.”

When Mark reached the Gray homestead, a few moments later, he was panting heavily and wet with perspiration. There was a strange look on his drawn face, the sight of which brought a stab of dismay to the heart of Sister Patience as she saw it through the kitchen window. He appeared to be laboring under the spell of some tremendous emotion which he was striving to keep in check.

Opening the side door for him, she cried, "Mark! Lad, art thou ill? See, thou art even trembling and thy countenance is as pale as death. What has happened?"

For a moment he did not answer, and to her seeing eye it was evident that he was struggling hard to conquer his agitation over something. Finally he laughed, mechanically, and patted her arm.

"Nay, Sister Patience. I am quite well. I have merely been running . . . running fast, so that I might not be late for the wonderful supper whose savory odors I can now smell. Besides, I had double need to hasten, for I am going out again, the instant it is eaten."

"Art thou? Where, Mark?"

He merely laughed, more naturally, and stepped past her to the basin waiting in the kitchen sink, filled with refreshing ice-cold water.

## CHAPTER XX

### ACCUSED

A LITTLE more than an hour had elapsed. The front room of the Franklyn farmhouse now held a small gathering—Faith and the two children, Jeremiah Jones and Mark. Jeremiah was still squeamish inside but mentally sober and remorseful, although the destruction of his treasured wig had something to do with that.

Mark had hoped for at least a few moments alone with Faith, but, as the time for his arrival approached, she had suddenly become panic-stricken over the thought of her temerity in asking him to return, and had purposely kept the rest close by her. The girl's gentle word was law, there.

Disappointment and a marked nervousness in Mark's manner had been noticeable at first, but now both were yielding to the peaceful atmosphere of the little home, and Faith was happy. Mark, too, found himself well content merely to sit in the straight-backed chair which scarcely held his bulk, and gaze in silence at the girl in whom all his hopes were bound up. Pleasant day-dreams took possession of his mind. The time might come, and soon, when she would be sitting close beside him thus, each night,

busy with her needle, after his day's labor had ended.

The shadows of the evening hour were fast closing in upon the home, enfolding it and its occupants in their intangible mantle, but the lamp had not yet been lighted. Strict economy was Faith's watchword. The mistress of the home was sitting close by the window so that the sunset glow might illuminate her sewing to the last moment, and the sweetness of her profile as it showed against the fading color in the western sky, and the faint aureole which appeared about her head, caused Mark's heart to throb faster with pure delight.

At length she laid aside her work with a little sigh. "It is growing too dark for me to sew longer—I sometimes wish that the daylight lasted twenty-four hours, there is so much to be done."

"'He giveth to His beloved sleep' and the hours of darkness for a wise purpose," put in Mark.

"I know. What should we do without them, and it? Well, we shall have to light the lamp, shortly, but meditation seemeth to me to come with the shadow-hour, and the soul hath need of it . . . and prayer. Shall we not all join in them, silently, for a little while? David and Hope have been good children, all through the day I think, but perhaps even they know of some tiny sin which is tucked away in a corner of their hearts, and by asking God's forgiveness for it they will sleep better. As for us, who are grown up, surely we are all in con-



tinual need of seeking guidance from Him, for to err is human."

It was as natural for Faith Franklyn to speak after this manner, as for the girl of the city to discuss a new style or a new play. If such a suggestion had been made by the youthful hostess of a gathering in the average home throughout the land, embarrassment or even consternation would certainly have followed it. But not in Content. It was alike normal and customary. All five forthwith knelt down, with folded hands resting on their chair seats, eyes closed and heads humbly bent. Perhaps Jeremiah did not actually pray, but Faith's simple words had redoubled his remorse, and his silent shame was in a sense a petition for forgiveness. Perhaps neither David nor the little Hope prayed, for the world beyond seemed something unreal and very far away to their childish thoughts, yet it is actually very near to childhood, for the soul has not had long to walk from the light into the shadow of worldly evils. Perhaps Mark's conscious prayer was brief, for he was a man, and young. But Faith solemnly and sincerely opened her heart to heaven; for she was a woman, and devout.

For a time the silence within the room was broken only by Pat's contented purring, as she rubbed back and forth against Jeremiah's thigh. Then it was sharply interrupted by other sounds; heavy footsteps upon the porch, a loud rap on the door. All looked up, the two children eagerly, the others with

astonishment. And this expression deepened on Faith's countenance as she arose to her feet and opened the front door. It was almost entirely dark on the little porch, but the forms of three men were vaguely visible. Three men, at that time of night! What could it mean?

A voice demanded, "Is Friend Mark Gray within thine home, Sister Faith Franklyn?"

"Yea, Friend Daniel Goodbody. He hath joined our little household circle for evening prayer, in which we have just now engaged as the light failed." The darkness in the room demanded explanation. "Dost thou wish to speak with him? Wait one moment and I will light the lamp," she added.

At the sound of the deep masculine voice from the porch Mark had started, for he recognized it as that of a near neighbor, who—although of his father's generation—had always been truly his friend. Could anything have happened at home to send Daniel Goodbody here in quest of him. Faith had stepped back inside the door, and now struck a match. Mark took it from her hand and guarded the flickering flame from the draft through the open door until she had brought the lamp and turned up the wick to meet it. The circle of yellow radiance spread until it took in the group standing at the doorway. In front was Goodbody, a slender mild-faced man with almost white hair and steel-rimmed spectacles, who looked like the peaceful scholar which he was, and yet upon whose thin shoulders

rested the cloak of civil authority in Content. Even that simple village had need to invoke the majesty of the law on occasion, and he was constable and Justice of the Peace. Behind him, side by side, appeared the mighty form of the village smith, and the tall but slighter figure of Mr. John Hibbard. Their faces were still in the night shadow.

Even as Faith and Mark were, with somewhat unsteady hands, lighting the lamp, Daniel Goodbody had made answer to the girl's question, and now her hands flew up, to press, one over the other, upon her beating heart in the world-old feminine gesture. "I must see him, at once, although it is furthest from my wish," he had said, in a manner which added gravity to his words, and made the sentence seem one freighted with evil portent.

The new-comers stepped inside and all three regarded Mark with expressions of distress, but varying from accusation on the face of the justice to anguish on that of John Gray.

"What . . .?" began Faith, in a trembling voice. She unconsciously drew closer to Mark's side, while little Hope—on the verge of unhappy tears because she, too, possessed a little woman's intuition that something grievous had happened—reached up and grasped his hand on the other side.

"Mark Gray," announced the officer, in a tone filled with misery, "Mark Gray, I would willingly surrender mine office rather than do what is now my duty, and which I have made affirmation to per-

form. I have come to . . . to arrest thee, in the name of the law, Mark Gray."

Faith uttered a low, horror-stricken cry, and swayed against her lover's shoulder.

"Arrest me? Arrest *me*? But why?" Unfeigned amazement was the predominating note in Mark's demand.

Goodbody turned to the smith, upon whose face agony was almost visibly drawing new lines. "Wilt thou tell him, Friend John?"

"It is thine office. I . . . I cannot speak."

The other faced Mark again, and said, speaking very slowly, "Alas, my boy, that ever I should have to say these words to thee, but thou art formally charged with criminal assault with a deadly weapon, upon one Robert Means, and an attempt to . . . to murder him."

The silence which followed this stunning sentence was broken by a bitter wail from Hope. She could not fully comprehend, but it was something awful. Mark mechanically reached out his shaking hand and touched her golden curls as she pressed her face against his side. And when words came they were uttered mechanically, as though his mind were too bewildered to respond at once either to anger or anguish.

"'An attempt to murder him?' To *murder* . . .? Why . . . why. . . ."

"It is my further duty to caution thee, Mark



Gray. Whatever thou sayest now may be used against thee."

"What should I say that could be used against me? I can only tell the truth. I did not do it! Why, how could I have done it? He was the one that had the weapon. It was he who fired at *me!*"

At Mark's first declaration of his innocence, Faith's heart had leaped with happiness almost too great to be borne, but when he added the words, "He was the one that had the weapon," it stopped and seemed to congeal within her breast. She grew cold all over, and felt the blood drain from her face. What was he saying? He *had* had a pistol; worse than that, he had it still! As she leaned against his tense body she could feel the sinister metal thing inside his pocket pressed hard into her right arm.

The damning weapon was in his possession, now. What if they should search him, and find it? The question of Mark's guilt or innocence of the terrible crime with which he was charged, or whether he had told a deliberate falsehood, could not at that moment so much as creep into her mind, so full it was with that single overwhelming thought. There was no time for debate between Right and Wrong; no Homeric struggle took place within her soul; the knowledge that she—a Quaker—was acting in contradiction to the teachings of her religion and every tradition of her faith had no place in her thoughts. She was nothing, then, but a woman, at bay by the side of the man she loved with all her being, whom

her heart had chosen for its mate, and to whom she had pledged her aid whatever happened and forever and forever.

Swiftly but cautiously she drew up her arm and thrust her hand into the pocket where the weapon lay. Her seeking fingers closed upon it. She started to draw it out; to hide it behind her.

Mark felt the touch of her hand and, startled, drew away a little, at the same instant looking down at his side. His own face blanched and then flushed crimson.

Daniel Goodbody had seen the gleam of steel! He stepped forward and almost gently loosened the girl's fingers from the pistol barrel. With a sob, she dropped into a chair and buried her face in her hands. The look which the officer gave her held censure, pity—and understanding. He stood a moment without speaking; then, turning again to Mark, said with stern accusation, "Mark Gray, thou saidst that thou didst not have a pistol." He held the weapon up before the other's eyes.

"I did. I had no thought of lying, for of a verity I had forgotten it. It was truly in my possession, but I did not use it."

"To whom does this thing of wickedness belong?"

"To . . . to Robert Means. But . . ."

"Wait." He turned to Hibbard. "Doth this indeed belong to thy companion?"

"Yes," answered Hibbard. "And I can tell you how it came into Mark's possession—I was al-

together to blame for it, and I wish to heaven, gentlemen, that I had never brought Means here." Rather graphically he recounted the story of what had occurred at the gravel pit. Mark nodded his agreement, and briefly explained how he had brought the pistol away with him, and placed it in his pocket intending to return it.

Goodbody said, "Thy former statement is in part explained, but the fact that thou didst have a weapon in thy possession is against thee, I fear." He turned to Hibbard again and handed him the revolver, remarking, "I know naught about the workings of this or any weapon. Canst thou, by opening it, determine whether or not bullets have been discharged from it?"

The other examined the cartridge chamber, and responded, "Four of the five cartridges have been fired, but that may mean nothing at all for we had been using it in shooting at the target and I could not swear how many were discharged there, after the last loading." He looked at Mark with distress, for he wanted to believe the Quaker innocent, yet realized that the circumstantial evidence was piling up heavily against him, in possible collaboration of Means' story of the assault, which he had yet to tell.

Faith seemed to read something of his thoughts, and now she sprang to her feet, clasping Mark's arm with both her hands, and crying, "Mark, Mark! Tell him again that thou art innocent! They must

believe it, even as I do." As she spoke the last words in a voice which rang like a clear challenge to them all, she raised her tear-filled eyes and looked straight and searchingly into his. For an instant it was as though the unwavering gaze of each reached deep into the very soul of the other. Then Faith lifted her hands from the man's arm to his shoulders, and he drew her close in one single, swift embrace.

John Gray viewed the scene with eyes which suddenly grew misty, and, as Mark released the girl, he took one long stride forward and seized his hand in a powerful clasp. "My son. My son! I, too, believe in thee," he exclaimed, brokenly, then whispered, "O Lord, forgive Thou mine unbelief."

"Darn it, so do I believe you!" Hibbard was the next to affirm his faith and spring forward to grasp Mark's hand, while Faith hid her face on the smith's great breast.

"Nay, now I scarce care what happens," Mark rejoiced. "If Faith, my father and this new friend believe in me. . . ."

"Thou mayest count me in, as well," announced Goodbody, heartily, and both David and little Hope added their childish, "And me, and me."

"All this is cause for happiness, but we must face the fact that thou art still within the deep shadows, Mark," the constable continued. "Thou must remain for a while, at least, in my custody."

"I understand. But now I want to hear all that



hath happened, and the full but assuredly false charge against me. It must be plausible, for I saw doubt of me upon the faces of you all, when you entered the room. Yea, on thine, too, father."

"I know, my son. I was shaken to the very depths of my being by the story which thy friend Hibbard told, when he came seeking thee with Friend Daniel; the more so because thou wilt remember that thine own behavior, upon returning home was passing strange—as though something had occurred to upset thee greatly."

"Stop, Friend John," Goodbody interrupted. "I beg of thee to guard thy tongue before these witnesses."

"Nay, the whole truth must be told, and surely Mark hath no wish to seek evasion of it."

"None."

"Then we will let the city man tell what he hath to tell, and Mark, thou shalt answer."

"I hated to do this, Mark, but I had to," began Mr. Hibbard. "Bob Means really has been wounded and he was raving—besides, he was my guest, and in a sense under my charge. Finally, his story sounded at least plausible, as you said. This afternoon's unfortunate quarrel between the two of you furnished a background which was hard to put out of sight."

"I know, to my sorrow and my shame. I bear thee no ill-will, friend—perhaps this evil thing which hath befallen me is a righteous punishment for my

behavior to-day, although the charge itself is groundless."

"'Righteous punishment'? Nonsense. You acted with astonishing restraint and let Means off too easy."

"Nay . . . but continue thy story."

Hibbard hastily outlined what had occurred after Mark's departure from the gravel pit. He had, he said, with difficulty got Means back to the tent, where he had set to drinking heavily again. With a word of apology to Faith, the speaker added, "And I hoped that he would get himself dead drunk and then sleep off his passion with the liquor."

Instead, the whiskey had somewhat steadied him and he had finally announced that he meant to return to the pit and get both of the revolvers which had been forgotten and left behind there—at least, they had so far as he knew. Hibbard had let him go, gladly, well satisfied to be free of him for a while, and not once thinking that he might meet with Mark again. He had himself set about the preparation of their supper. Then he continued, "Within a very few minutes I heard the sound of a shot from that direction. It startled me, for my own nerves were a bit on edge, as you can imagine, but I concluded that Bob—that is to say, Mr. Means—was again firing at the target. However, remembering his condition, I was worried and had started to look him up, when I heard a second pistol crack.

"I had just reached the brow of our hill, and

across the field caught sight of some one running rapidly and on the point of disappearing over the top of the further rise. I could not be sure who it was, but . . . but it looked a lot like you, Mark."

"It was me," answered the young Quaker, without hesitation.

"So? Then I was right . . . I'm sorry to say. Well, then I heard Means calling, frantically. His voice indicated that he was in pain. I ran as hard as I could in the direction of it and finally located him, lying in the field which you must just have crossed. He said, 'I'm shot, Jack! That, . . .' never mind, I won't repeat his words, . . . 'picked another quarrel and deliberately shot me.'"

"Oh!" broke in Mark, unable longer to restrain his rising anger. "The evil and foul-mouthed son of Satan, prince of liars!"

"Hush, hush, Mark!" Faith whispered, as she took his clenched hand in both of hers and pressed it gently.

"I could not believe him, at first," went on Hibbard. "But as I half-helped, half-carried him back to the camp, he panted out a story which seemed to hang together, and put my heart down in my boots on your account, the more so because I blamed myself for all that had previously happened. He said that he had failed to find either of the revolvers. . . ."

Mark would have interrupted again, but the girl raised one of her hands and laid it upon his lips.

“ . . . And was about to return when you appeared from the direction of the Franklyn farmhouse.”

“That, at least, is true,” exclaimed Mark.

“He went on to say that, when you caught sight of him, you cried, ‘Now that thy companion is not here to save thee I am going to kill thee, because of the name which thou hast called me,’ and drew one of the weapons from your pocket.”

“Oh!”

“Wait. You might as well hear the whole story at once. He was frightened, so he said—for which I could not blame him, knowing your ability—and started to run across the field. You followed, still threatening him, and he finally turned and grappled with you. The revolver was exploded once in the air, according to his account, but you discharged it a second time, wounding him in the leg, and then ran.”

Mark laughed, harshly and unnaturally. “A pretty story, and a likely one! Dost thou think that if I had grappled with him, he could have prevented me from shooting him through the heart at the outset, had I so desired, or that I would have needed a pistol at all with which to kill him?” Unconscious of what he was doing, he extended his arms and tensed his mighty muscles until the bulging of them showed through his coat sleeves.

“No,” answered Hibbard. “Damned—pardon me—if I do, or did; although I know that men who



have been drinking or are sufficiently frightened often developed a frenzied strength far in excess of that of which they are capable normally. I merely thought that he was romancing a bit, to save his face. But he was so insistent that you had done it, that—after I had given him army first aid, the bullet having, fortunately, merely gone clean through the fleshy part of his leg—I yielded to his demand that when I went to the village to try and hunt up a doctor I also find a constable and procure your arrest.”

“I understand. It was clearly thy duty, Friend Hibbard. But his story was all a lie. This is the truth of it. We met, even as he said, and I—knowing the danger of such a meeting, for I could see that he was hot with drink and mine own temper is far from mild—would have given him a wide berth. But he ran towards me, calling me vile epithets, waving his pistol, and daring me to fight. I but ran the faster, for I was frightened—for the first time in my life, I think. But I was looking back at him and stumbled, and before I could arise he had overtaken me.”

In growing excitement Mark now began to act out the incident, as he hastened on, “I seized his wrist and twisted it hard, to make him drop the weapon. He did so, with a cry, but not before it had gone off, once, into the air. He stood there, holding his wrist and cursing me; and, although all of the fiends of hell seemed to be loose within my

heart and urging me to strike him again, I did not, but turned and ran on, after first kicking the revolver to one side. He continued to scream after me, words which I can never forget, but I only ran the faster. Then I heard a second shot and knew that he had recovered the weapon and was firing at me, but the next instant I had crossed the hilltop, and was out of his sight. That is the truth; Faith, father. Was it not enough to account for mine appearance on arriving home?"

"I'll say that it was," Hibbard answered for them, and Daniel Goodbody added, "Yea. All of us here surely believe thine account of the matter, and I doubt not but that the trial justice will, likewise. But this is a black and bitter time for thee, Mark. Many in Content will doubt thee. . . ."

"And there are some who wilt rejoice at my downfall," said the man, grimly.

"Nay, speak not so bitterly, Mark," cried Faith. "The just God, who sendeth the glowing day to follow the night, wilt be thy shield and buckler in this new battle which thou hast to fight, almost alone. And surely our confidence in thee will also help to sustain and strengthen thee, my dear, my dear."

"Amen," John Gray added, huskily.

"Come, Mark. Remember that Paul was in prison often, and the Lord God delivered him, as He wilt thee, perhaps to be more truly His follower because of thine affliction. To those that are in-

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nocent its walls are no disgrace." The constable turned and Mark, with bowed head, followed him to the door. Hope was weeping again.

Faith did not move from her place until they had reached the threshold, but stood with quivering lips and tear-filled eyes. Suddenly she ran to him, crying, "Mark, Mark. How can I let thee go?"

For just an instant he pressed her close to his breast, then he turned sharply away and with proudly lifted head strode out into the darkness of the night.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE TEMPEST

SENSATIONS, like misfortunes, seem to occur in epidemics. A man, or a locality, will plod along an unvaryingly monotonous path for years, each succeeding day merely morning, afternoon, and night, like its predecessor. Then, suddenly, all of the possible incidents and accidents which might have been met with along the road, but were not, happen all at once—like things in a nightmare from which the victim awakes to find himself drenched with cold perspiration and panting for breath. And after it is all over the participant catches himself wondering if it were not a dream. Why, such things couldn't have happened to *him*! Yet he knows that they did.

Mark Gray and the whole peaceful village of Content were now fully embarked on such a brief but tempestuous journey—one which was to stir the Quaker community as it had never been stirred in its existence.

There was but one telephone in the place, at Dexter's general store, yet the story of Mark's "crime" and the news of his arrest were all over Content before it had retired for the night. Dyer Dexter



dwelt but a quarter of a mile from the Goodbody homestead, and although the constable lived up to his surname, his wife—a sore trial to him and a test of his Quaker patience—might better have been called “busybody.” She had overheard the charge made by Mr. Hibbard to her husband, and the pair had hardly departed in quest of Mark before she was out of the back door and in the front door of the Dexter homestead, from which central station the news had been broadcast by means of a form of wireless in use ages and ages before mechanical transmitters of messages were so much as thought of. And needless to say, the one-sided story became more and more distorted with every repetition.

Few households went to bed, that night, without knowledge of the amazing fact that the one room shed with its single barred window, behind the Goodbody homestead, had been cleaned of the spare tools and odds and ends which the local justice had fallen into the habit of storing there, and contained its second prisoner within the memory of living men. Some years previous Jeremiah Jones had occupied it for one night, having been placed there primarily because Friend Daniel, who had found him lying by the roadside, was unwilling to disturb the Franklyn family, and considered it a proper spot for him to sleep off the effects of a drunken orgy. Also as a warning.

In many a home an upright Quaker parent seized upon the occasion to read his brood a long and se-

rious lecture upon the wages of sin and the just retribution which befalls the man who deviates ever so slightly from the straight and narrow path. In many another the long evening prayer contained a heartfelt petition that he who was in prison might soon be free, found guiltless, and that in the meantime his soul might be sustained by the everlasting arms. Four individuals, in particular, remained long upon their knees that night with heads bowed down in grief. They were John Gray, Sister Patience, Faith, and Mark, himself.

At last all save one light flickered and went out, and sleep spread her silent wings over the village.

But there was no slumber for Mark Gray. Even if his thoughts would have allowed him to sleep, he would have found the narrow cot bed which had been placed there for his use too small to hold his form. Four strides eastward, four strides westward, he continued to pace through the long hours, now and again pausing at the barred window to look out into the darkness of the night.

The sky overhead was clear—a canopy of velvet of the darkest blue-black, against which innumerable stars shimmered and the nearer planets shone with a calm and friendly light. They held a peaceful inspiration, but meant less to the man than did one nearer at hand which sent forth its mellow beam from an upper room in the Franklyn farmhouse, half a mile distant, with a steady message of comfort. Yet it brought him also added pain. Mark

understood that Faith was keeping it burning there as a token of her love and fidelity; but he likewise knew that she had not retired, and the knowledge of her mental anguish on his account added greatly to the burden which he had to bear.

Thus minutes dragged out into hours, and the night passed. To the young man, who had never experienced a full night of sleeplessness, the very seconds, ticked off by his inexpensive silver watch, seemed to march slowly by to the drum-throbs of his heart in an unending funeral procession. Physical discomfort was added to mental. Not only were his quarters cramped, but the May night was unseasonably and oppressively hot.

At length, towards early morning, came a change, almost imperceptible at first. One by one the stars in the western heavens disappeared, blotted out by a rising billow of clouds, the outlines of which were from time to time sharply disclosed by the pale glare of more remote lightning. Miles away thunder growled like the sound of distant battle. A faint stirring of cooler air fanned Mark's cheek as he pressed it against one of the bars. He greeted the change with pleasure, for a tempest promised both relief from the sultry heat and something to watch and take his mind off his troubles.

Under the drive of a rapidly rising wind the storm came on apace and soon was spending its fury overhead. The little building trembled anew at each thunder crash; the rolling fields, the shining



silver streamlet threading through them, and the dark patches of grove on the hillsides were alternately thrown into photographic relief by the lightning's flash and swallowed up in a blackness which seemed, by contrast, doubly black. There was almost no rain—an occasional spatter of flying drops—but every bough and branch with fluttering green drapery joined in a furious dance to the mad chant of the storm winds among them.

Mark gloried in the tempest's on-coming, but when it was directly overhead the crashing fury of it subdued, if it did not actually frighten, him. Once he caught himself with a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach and wondering whether or not a bolt might actually strike the building and put an abrupt end to the tragedy which had overtaken him. He caught himself almost wishing that it might, and was straightway ashamed of the wish and childishly frightened at having given it birth. Supposing that He, who hears even the unasked petitions of His children, should grant it! Even the sanest, most modern man has moments of reversion to primitive fear like that.

Another cause for anxiety quickly drove from his mind any thoughts of self. The Franklyn farm was too far distant for him actually to see Faith close the blinds of her bedroom window, but the consoling light was suddenly cut off. He knew that she was alone, perhaps terrified, for the storm was exceptionally severe. His breast ached to hold her



close and comfort her. He had done it, once, twice, and his arms felt their emptiness.

Came a terrific flash and the shock of the thunder clap simultaneously. He had been looking up, and saw the blinding white bolt streak downward, but the intensity of its glare seared his eye-balls and robbed him of sight. With the speed of the lightning itself the thought went through his mind, "The building *has* been struck!"

He was wrong. The bolt had grounded itself a quarter of a mile away—through the ell chimney of Faith's homestead.

Mark regained his power of vision in time to see the toppling chimney fall and slide down the steep roof, as another flash illuminated the scene. He stood tense and motionless—almost paralyzed. There followed another period of darkness which seemed to stretch over an age, but before it ended his straining eyes could see a tiny glow and tongue of flame. The shingles, dry as tinder from the prolonged draught, had caught fire!

Fairly beside himself with terror on Faith's account, Mark turned and leaped through the darkness across the room, at the same time shouting aloud with all the strength of his powerful lungs. But against the sounds of the storm his cry had as little chance of being heard within the Goodbody home, as though it had been uttered by a Lilliputian. He flung all the weight of his muscular body as a human battering ram against the door. It sprung

and bent, but still held. Again and yet again he assaulted it with frenzied strength, regardless of the bruises it dealt to his broad shoulder. At last the staple which held the padlock on the outside pulled out, the door flew open, and he went sprawling headlong to the ground.

The tempest was retreating eastward as fast as it had come, its work in that locality completed. An intermittent but increasingly steady flame appeared on the roof of the ell. Mark sprang to his feet and raced to the door of the near-by homestead. With heavy fists he flayed upon it until every knuckle was bruised and bleeding, and at length the hammering and his shouting brought the constable to one of the windows.

"The Franklyn farmhouse . . . struck . . . on fire. Come quick!" He panted out and then dashed off into the night.

The fast-receding flares of lightning were of occasional service to him in illuminating his path across the uneven field, but during the periods of darkness he many times stumbled over ruts and rocks or crashed headfirst into impeding clumps of bushes. The thunder still rumbled and crashed in the east, the wind moaned and sometimes seemed to chuckle, gleefully, as it fanned the flame now spreading along the ridgepole of the roof before him.

He could see no signs of life within the house—indeed, the sound of the storm had swallowed that of the single lightning bolt, and Faith, in her dis-

tant front room, had no idea that her home had been struck.

“O God, tell them . . . tell them!” he prayed as he ran. “Why doesn’t Faith hear?”

In two minutes of hard running he had reached the house and was pounding loudly on the front door. Faith came quickly—although the interval seemed another age to Mark—unlocked and opened it. She was carrying her bedroom lamp, the yellow light of which showed her to be partially undressed, for she had just then hastily thrown a light wrapper over her simple underwear, and her startled face was set in the tumbling mass of her unloosed hair. In contrast to the formal primness of her usual attire this negligee made her appear irresistibly attractive, but Mark scarcely noticed it at all, nor yet the expression of astonishment which crept into her countenance as she recognized her nocturnal visitor. She had been thinking constantly of him; now he had appeared before her as though in answer to her prayer and her one thought was, “Mark is no longer in prison.”

The man grasped her arm, convulsively, crying, “For heaven’s sake come out, quick. Where are the children—David . . . Hope?”

“Why, Mark . . .” she started to answer, completely bewildered.

“Don’t stop to talk. The house is on fire—the ell’s burning up. Oh, where are they, Faith?”

Even as he was speaking and pushing by her into



the house, David appeared at the head of the stairs in his nightgown, with his eyes wide circles in his startled face. All the cannonading of the thunder had not aroused him from the deep sleep of healthy childhood, but Mark's voice, calling his name, had brought him out of bed.

"Oh!" exclaimed the startled girl. "David, thy sister! Get her quickly. The house is afire."

Mark was already halfway up the steep stairs, covering three at a time. He sprang past the boy, who had turned to the door of the bedroom shared by him and little Hope, and caught the sleeping child up in one strong arm while she gave voice to a drowsy, whimpering protest. Hastily folding her in the sheet and then snatching a thin comforter from the foot of the bed and a bundle of neatly folded child's clothing from a near-by chair, he hurried the little family downstairs again and out upon the porch.

With an audible breath of relief, he surrendered the small girl to Faith's arms. Already the flickering reflection of the fire appeared on the ground at the back of the house.

"Jeremiah sleepeth in the barn loft—like the two children he must have slumbered through it all," said Faith, and Mark found himself actually able to laugh as he answered, "But not for the same reason, I fear."

He was off at full speed around the corner of the house, and as he ran he looked up at the ell roof.



The tinder-dry shingles were all ablaze for several square yards about the chimney, and red lines of fire were creeping steadily along the edges of others, towards the main part of the dwelling.

His shouts of "Jeremiah! Jeremiah, the house is on fire! Wake up!" preceded him, and when he reached and slid open the big barn door the dazed man-of-all-work was swaying on the top rung of his ladder. He was bare-footed, still, but he had succeeded in pulling on an old pair of overalls over the soiled shirt in which he had been sleeping. One strap was over his shoulder, the other flapped aimlessly by his side.

"What the tarnation . . . ?" he querulously began, but descended quickly enough when Mark explained and bade him hasten to get buckets and a ladder. The words were barely out of his mouth before he was off again, headed for the side porch with its trellis heavy with rambler roses, to which the daylight would soon impart tones of pink and deep red. Without pausing, he started to climb up it. Against the light of the growing fire the lattice work stood out like black tracery. Almost every second time that he attempted to thrust his big, square-toed boot into the intersections the frail laths broke. But the sturdy vine and its sinew-like tendrils helped to furnish a foothold for him now and then, and although they broke often he half-pulled, half-scrambled up it, somehow.

The jutting eave of the roof was but a temporary

obstacle. Chinning himself on every available bough had always been one of Mark's "childish pastimes"—as his neighbors designated it—and now it stood him in good stead. Gripping the edge of the roof with one hand and digging the fingernails of the other into the shingles above, he pulled the dead weight of his one-hundred and ninety pound body up and over it with one effort which started the sweat all over him. Then, on his knees and bleeding hands, he crawled along the roof and to the burning ell.

The flames were leaping higher and higher as though with exultation over their sudden growth, and smaller ones were licking hungrily at the same strengthening fuel upon which their big brothers had fed. The shingles were old and warped, the nails loose, and Mark, standing half upright, now began frantically to kick them off and send them tumbling over and over down through the semi-darkness, flaming in their flight.

Under the spur of the moment's excitement Jeremiah had likewise been acting with double the haste he could have mustered up for ordinary work. He stumbled blindly into all sorts of implements, which seemed to move from their accustomed places and deliberately get in his way, but he managed to locate a ladder and two of the old Prophet's feed buckets in very brief time.

Faith was also acting rapidly, and she was certainly the coolest of them all. After wrapping

little Hope in the comforter, and instructing her to stay as quiet as a mouse upon the porch and watch what they were doing, she called to the tremendously excited David, who had, at her command, succeeded in struggling into his pantaloons, wrong way about, "Hurry, David, bring me the big wash tub; it is just within the back hallway."

The boy obeyed, fumbling about in the darkness until he had found it, and by the time he had dragged it to the well and Jeremiah had reached the same spot with his paraphernalia, Faith had one bucket brimming full of water already drawn up to the surface and poised ready to empty into the tub.

"Hurry, hurry, Jeremiah!" Mark kept calling from the roof. "Hurry, or the fire will certain get entirely away from us." Disregarding the many burns which were momentarily being inflicted upon his already badly bruised hands, he was tearing and kicking away the loosened shingles, all afire, and when the other man's glistening bald head finally appeared above the eaves, he very nearly lost his precarious footing upon the steep surface altogether, in reaching down to seize the bucket handed up to him. More skin was ripped from his finger tips as he dug them into the splintery shingles, but he saved himself, and an instant later the insignificant amount of precious water which still remained in the bucket went sizzling onto the flames. Jeremiah had spilled most of it as he stumbled nearsightedly from the well and climbed the ladder. The tongues of



fire licked up the little which reached them so quickly that Mark began to think his task a hopeless one.

But he stuck to it. So did the others; Faith filling the wash tub for David to dip from and bear to Jeremiah, and so they continued until the shouts of several men running up the road heralded the arrival of help.

Daniel Goodbody, and a number of other men and boys aroused by him en route, were at hand, bringing the only fire apparatus which Content knew—more ladders and more buckets. Friend Dyer Dexter was with them, and his natural position of authority in the village as its wealthiest man led him to take command. A complete line of water-passers was formed; another active youth scrambled up beside the exhausted Mark, and in a very few moments the last spark gave up the ghost with a protesting hiss, and all was dark.

Mark slid slowly down the roof until his seeking feet found the top round of the ladder. He suddenly felt very weak indeed; his face was scorched and one eyebrow had disappeared; his hands were badly burned and had begun to feel like two huge aching bruises. He was glad to feel other arms supporting him on either side, as he half-slid and half-climbed down the ladder to the firm ground.

The faintest streak of pearl-tinted gray had begun to spread along the eastern horizon, but it was still blessedly dark beside the house. Faint and unsteady as he was he did not wish to be seen by his neigh-



bors. A hand, cool and moist, touched his, then another. Faith had somehow found him in the darkness. The pain which her grasp caused to the raw, torn flesh was lost in the joy of the contact as she bent close, whispering scarcely loud enough for him to hear the words, "Oh, Mark . . . my dear one! Thou hast saved all of our lives a second time. God bless thee! God bless thee!"

Her lips touched his burning cheek for an instant, and he felt the salty smart of a tear upon it.

Then he silently slipped away, without speaking, and was gone in the enshrouding darkness.

## CHAPTER XXII

### MORNING.

ONE by one the seven black veils of night were lifted, most imperceptibly, and rosy Dawn stood revealed. But the lovely mystery of morning's birth—so infinitely wonderful, yet so commonplace—held no deeper significance to the group of serious, half-clad, and perspiring Quakers in the yard of the Franklyn farmhouse than the fact that they could begin to see, make sure that the fire was fully out, and estimate the damage in dollars and cents. One or two departed but the rest remained, held by the instinct which causes groups of men to linger on the spot where any unusual event has taken place, and live it over again in words.

“Who was the man that was already upon the burning roof when we arrived, Friend Matthew?” Daniel Goodbody suddenly inquired of the youth who had climbed up to assist Mark. “It must have been he who aroused me, but I did not quite recognize his voice.”

Faith shrank back behind the buxom form of Mistress Goodbody, the constable's spouse having just put in her appearance. The girl's face blanched. Ever since the daylight had begun to

strengthen she had been searching the little group with her anxious eyes, and knew that Mark had vanished from it—fled into the night.

Matthew Wills gave a start, and responded, "Why, verily that was odd, although in mine excitement I had not given thought to the matter before. It was Friend Mark Gray."

"Mark Gray?" repeated Goodbody, in astonishment, and Dyer Dexter echoed the words. The others regarded one another with looks of surprised inquiry.

After an instant of silence the constable demanded, "Art thou certain?"

"Of a surety it was he, Friend Daniel. I gave his presence no thought, for he is always the first on hand when anything occurs in Content, and it never so much as entered my head that he was supposed to be in . . ." He stopped, for he had heard Faith's smothered cry. The rest, very serious of face, at once turned towards her, and Dyer Dexter demanded, "Is this indeed true, Sister Faith? Was Mark Gray the one who . . . ?"

She stepped resolutely forward. "Yea. It was he. Once more Mark Gray hath given us his timely aid—perhaps saved our lives, for I did not know that the house had been struck by the lightning and was on fire. There is none other in Content, or elsewhere, like him." With a wild sob her voice broke and she turned to bury her face on Mistress Goodbody's ample bosom. The latter was

thrilled. Here was real romance and food for future gossip. With exaggerated tenderness she led the girl to the house, picking up Hope and David on the way.

Again there was silence for an instant. Then the constable said, solemnly, "He hath, indeed, been instrumental in saving them—God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform—and we must not permit ourselves to forget that fact in case he hath now . . ." He stopped, and a deeply troubled note sounded in his voice as he continued, "I cannot think that he hath deliberately fled, although . . . It would be a sad blow to me if he hath, for he was in my keeping. What shall I say to those from whom I receive mine authority?"

"Nay, do not let thine heart be unduly troubled over that, Friend Daniel," broke in another of the party. "Surely thou art in nowise to blame if thou locked him up properly. Prisoners escape even from the stone walls of city jails."

"Yea, I know. But it is incomprehensible to me how he could have broken out. The door was strong and the padlock secured, I am certain of that."

"He hath strength beyond the average," put in a third.

"Truly. But it was not enough unless . . . unless the Lord, to Whom all things are possible, gave him added power that he might act as His agent in the saving of the innocent. Doubtless



he beheld the lightning's bolt strike this house. Oh, I cannot believe that it was for himself that he made his escape, I cannot, Friends. Nay, Mark Gray's flight was not premeditated."

Dyer Dexter's grating voice answered, "Thou wert ever too soft of heart for thine office, Friend Daniel. How dost thou know that the man had not already freed himself, perhaps using some implement which thou hadst forgotten and left within the jail-house, and later saw the fire? I would not trust him. He had done many things. . . ."

"They were all the result of sudden great temptations; we know how he hath been afflicted, all his life. Nay, he did not do that."

"A youth—a Quaker youth—who would shoot a man . . ."

"He did not! At least I firmly believe that he hath been falsely accused," snapped Goodbody, and Friend Matthew answered, "Is it not then possible that he hath now gone to the camp of the city strangers to . . . to . . ." He likewise left his sentence incompleated but pregnant with inuendo.

"I do not believe so. Of course it is barely possible; but if he did, no further harm can come of it for Mr. Means is no longer there. His friend drove him back to the city, late last evening, upon the advice of Friend Paul Mayberry, our beloved physician, that he receive the treatment of his own doctor. Nevertheless, I must do my duty. If Mark Gray hath indeed fled we are scarce likely to

apprehend him, hereabouts, yet I call upon thee, Friend Matthew, and thee and thee," he indicated two others of the young men, "to make search for him at yonder camp. I must myself hasten home and make ready to go at once to the county-seat and report his escape to the authorities."

The designated trio set forth up the cart path across the meadow, while the rest fell in behind Daniel Goodbody as he started homewards, with hands clasped and eyes fixed on the roadway and full of pain. Upon reaching their several abodes the others left him, with a friendly word at parting, and he turned into his own yard, alone. At the end of the path stood the little toolhouse prison. Its door was swinging slightly back and forth, moved by the fresh morning breeze, and Goodbody approached to close it, and likewise to discover how Mark could have made his escape.

At the threshold he came to an abrupt stop and lifted his hands, uttering an exclamation of astonishment. For within the shed, on the edge of the narrow cot, sat his prisoner. His forearms were resting wearily upon his knees, with his big hands hanging limply before him; his chin was on his breast and his eyes bent to the floor, the very picture of fatigue and misery. Bursting in upon him, the constable cried, joyfully. "Mark! My boy, my boy—and I feared that thou hadst fled." He would have seized both of the man's hands but Mark hastily drew them back, supplicating him with

the words, "Nay, I pray thee." Then he instinctively held them up, blackened and blistered by the fire, torn and bleeding. Friend Daniel gave an exclamation of mixed horror and pity.

"Oh! Thou art fearfully, fearfully burned. Thy face, too! My poor lad, my poor lad, thou must be in mortal agony. Come. Come to the house with me forthwith, and I will hasten to summon the physician to attend thee." He laid his hand sympathetically on Mark's bruised shoulder, whereat the latter winced and drew back again. For all his pain, the young man tried to laugh in substantiation of his answer, "Nay, 'tis nothing. I am all right." But the attempt was abortive and sounded more like a gasp.

"Nothing, indeed! I commend thy courage more than thy wisdom. And come thou must. Thou hast done a noble thing this day, and I am everlastingly thy friend, Mark Gray, and cannot endure to see thee suffer needlessly, even for an instant." Again with the best of intentions he placed his hand on an aching bruise.

Mark had started to dissent, saying, "Nay. I cannot enter thy dwelling while . . ." but he stopped with a groan and swayed noticeably. He had never known what it was to feel faint, but now his head swam and the floor grew misty and tilted up. The combination of pain and sudden weakness from his exhausting labors were proving too much for him.



"Water!" he whispered, weakly. "I do not need a physician, but if I may have a drink of . . . ." He toppled over sideways upon the bed.

The icy cold well-water which Goodbody brought revived him quickly, and he continued to insist, more naturally, that he did not require a doctor's aid. But although the constable understood his feelings and Quaker stubbornness, he was not to be turned from his purpose, and hurried out again. In passing the door he instinctively took hold of it for the purpose of closing it, but checked himself and threw it wide open, so that the morning sunlight streamed brightly in.

The look of silent gratitude in Mark's countenance repaid him.

It was a strange Sabbath morning for the village of Content.

How materially the events of the night had stirred it from its long-established habits was made evident by the fact that in the majority of cases the meeting-goers departed from their accustomed routes to the place of worship and somehow managed to pass the little lock-up, nearly a mile beyond the village. There small groups of them came to a pause regarding the door which at Mark's request had once more been closed, though not fastened, and talked together in low, excited tones.

Rumor had taken wing again, and there were few who had not heard, before breakfast, of what the



smith's son had done during the darkness and the storm. Nor that even the officer of the law himself, Friend Daniel Goodbody, had openly declared that he believed the lad the victim of a maliciously false and unthinkably wicked charge. The revulsion of feeling was almost complete; the pendulum of popular opinion had swung far back again. Human nature cannot be altogether made over. Emotions, creditable and discreditable, sway the hearts of the most formal of us, and must find their outward expression in some way. Mark Gray was again a hero in the community, the more so because he was wounded and in duance. Even the narrowest-minded among them, who had always looked askance at the youth and deplored his worldly tendencies—even Dyer Dexter himself—dared not verbally oppose the sweep of sentiment in his favor.

Many of his neighbors would gladly have called upon him to offer their consolation, and express their faith in him and his cause. But Daniel Goodbody used his authority sternly to forbid it. He knew how Mark felt on that subject, and declared that his condition was such that only the members of his immediate family—who had come even before the physician—might see him. It was a falsehood, perhaps, but surely the whitest of white lies, and he had suddenly come to a complete understanding of the young man's mind and he knew that his pride would bitterly rebel against even the kind-

liest intentioned visitation while he was suffering and under the cloud.

Then came the old carry-all from the Franklyn farm, with Jeremiah—the yellow straw hat jammed tightly down upon his wigless head—Hope, David and Faith. It stopped at the gate. The girl descended and passed, with bent head, between the whispering little groups. She reached the door where the constable stood like a very mild-faced guardian dragon with sparse white hair and steel-rimmed spectacles.

The eager listeners heard him say, "I bid thee good morning, Sister Faith. Thou wilt surely be welcome here." They saw him open the door, and close it behind her.

Then there were indeed whisperings, and many who had been most anxious to do the same spoke with unmitigated criticism of the unseemliness of Sister Faith Franklyn, a young and unmarried woman, calling upon Mark, and talked on until Daniel Goodbody approached them with poorly concealed indignation and bade them hold their peace.

One had the courage to remind him that the girl was not one of his intimate family, and he answered, "There are ties stronger in the sight of God even than those of blood—as thou shouldst know, Sister Mary. The man hath twice all but laid down his life for her. Go thou and read the thirteenth verse of the fifteenth chapter of John, and see

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whether or not thou then thinkest that he hath the right to receive ministrations from her hands and comfort from her mouth which hath never uttered evil of him . . . as many have."

Somewhat chastened, the lingerers moved away towards the Meeting House, with a new and choice morsel of gossip to roll upon their tongues. So Faith Franklyn was actually and openly countenancing the suit of Mark Gray!

And when, a full half hour late, the girl herself entered the place of meeting and walked to her accustomed seat with eyes modestly lowered but with a brave look upon her face and an illumination shining out of it from the light which glowed within her heart, few there were who did not forget their silent prayers long enough to thrill at the thought of the romance which centered in her.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### BEFORE THE STORM

As Mark sat rather disconsolately within his flimsy cell on the following morning, there came a rap on the unlocked door.

"Come in," he called, and smiled with a tinge of bitterness over the absurdity of his granting the permission. What, indeed, had he to say about the incomings of any one—he, a prisoner, even though his door were not barred? His jailer entered, and the grave greeting which he gave Mark soothed his ruffled feelings like a benediction. Then, with a dramatic gesture foreign to one of his training, Daniel Goodbody threw wide open the door which he was still holding, and announced, "See, it is a symbol. Thou art wholly free to depart."

The young man started up, an eager look upon his scarred face. "Free?" he gasped out. "Dost thou mean that mine accuser hath . . . ?"

Goodbody showed his distress both in look and voice, over having thus aroused false hopes in the prisoner, as he responded, "Nay. Alas, that is not what I meant, my boy. Unless he suffers a change of heart thy case must still be tried at the next term of the County Court which cometh in on



Monday week, and I doubt not but that thou wouldst rather have it thus, so that thy vindication mayst be complete. I would better have said, 'thou art free to leave this place and return to the bosom of thine own family at home, upon giving me thy word—which I do not need nor yet demand—that thou wilt not leave Content, until . . .'

He stopped.

Mark regarded him with slowly dawning comprehension.

"Thou meanest that some one hath furnished bail for me?"

The constable nodded his assent.

"But . . . but who? Father wouldst gladly do it, I know, but he hath not sufficient money without placing a mortgage upon our home, which I begged that he would not do."

Something in the other's noticeable hesitancy about answering gave Mark a hint of the truth. "Not Sister Faith Franklyn!" he said. "Of course not. Why, she hath nothing—less even than my father. Friend Daniel it . . . it was not *she*!"

The constable smiled and nodded again.

"But . . . but it is impossible. Even though the amount of the bail were not large—and I have no idea of what is customary—where would she have got the money? And I know that her farm beareth mortgages to the last cent of its value. She . . . *Dyer Dexter*! Tell me, Friend Daniel, she did not borrow from him; she could not have done that?"

"I cannot tell thee. I have been strictly enjoined to say nothing—I have said too much, already. Is it not enough that thou hast friends so true and trusting, and that thou art free from prison?"

"Nay, it is not enough. Or rather it is too much! I cannot, I will not accept my liberty at such a price. Dost thou not understand what it means, Friend Daniel? I will not have her lay herself under a debt to him, for my sake, no matter how small the obligation. I will not!" Mark was now pacing back and forth and pressing his hands together, in his mental agony utterly unconscious of the physical pain which the act caused him.

"Come, come lad. Control thyself. This is foolish on thy part. I do not know just what arrangements have been made, but if perchance Friend Dyer hath entered into them it is only meet and right that he should have done so. He is thy neighbor, and well-to-do. Moreover he is a just man, albeit somewhat hard at times, and our faith layeth an obligation upon each of us to render assistance, in as far as we can, to our neighbors. He is to be commended, I think."

"And dost thou think that he hath done this for me?" Mark gave a short rasping laugh. "Nay, I can very well understand it all. Faith hath humbled herself for my sake, and he hath given her the wherewithal to purchase my relief that he might appear generous, magnanimous in her eyes and

likewise gain a hold upon her. I will not have it. I shall remain here," he ended, setting his lips in a stubborn line."

"Thou canst not, Mark. Thy release is an accomplished fact. And I think that thou art now behaving like a boy and wholly without the spirit of Christianity. Perhaps I am not entirely lacking in comprehension of thy feelings, but take the advice of one old enough to have been thy father, and be more charitable, accepting this friendly act in the spirit of friendliness. Perchance thou art doing a grave injustice to Friend Dyer, and at least thou shouldst rejoice that Sister Faith hath shown herself so truly named. Her love for thee, and thine for her, is now no secret. Let this be a proof of both, for a gracious, thankful acceptance of an offering of affection is on a parity with the gift itself."

"It is infinitely more difficult," groaned Mark, as he dropped back upon the bed and covered his face with his hands.

"Therefore the more commendable. Truly adversity hath its uses; it is a touchstone by which the gold of unalloyed friendship is tested. Come now. This is a chance for thee to prove thyself wholly the man. Thy father and Sister Patience are awaiting thee, at home."

During the six days which followed, Mark saw Faith just once, and then the width of the Meeting

House separated them as they sat in their usual places—one on the left hand and the other on the right, at the Fifth Day meeting. But he had written to her—the first letter which he had ever indited to any girl or she received from any man. It had been a very brief and simple epistle of gratitude and loyalty, ending with the statement that she would understand why he did not come to her again until the charge against him should be removed. He did not mention Dyer Dexter, or the part which, he had correctly concluded, the village's Croesus had played in his deliverance.

The girl understood, and kept the letter close to her heart. For her the passing days were filled with deep anxiety, more on his account than her own, even though her whole life was in upheaval and threatening to fall about her in ruins. For Mark's sake she had borrowed from her neighbor, and although the loan was but a temporary one, and Dexter had been well content to ask for no security, it placed her in his debt. Appalling thought to take to her sleepless bed along with all her other worries! And although she had escaped the Scylla of Means' daily visits she was caught in the whirlpool of Charybdis, for Friend Dyer made it his duty to call upon her each evening during the hour of family prayer. He never attempted to make even Quaker love to her—he was far too wise for that—but his mere presence seemed to hold the threat of an invisible whip over her spirit, and his



awkward attempts at sympathy were maddening to her.

Faith purposely kept away from the village, making Jeremiah her substitute in disposing of their garden truck and purchasing the things which their simple wants required. And she frequently sent David along with the farm hand, and never without some little verbal message, apparently of the boy's own making, between the spoken lines of which Mark could read and learn anew the breadth and depth of her love and confidence. Sometimes, too, David brought some simple gift—a few freshly cut roses, and cookies warm from the dutch oven, or other homely offerings which told the same story and meant the world to Mark.

The boy became a tangible tie between him and Faith, and Mark likewise enjoyed his almost daily visits to the smithy because of his own bright and cheerful company. All children were dear to him, and he found particular relief from his somber thoughts in talking to the lad whose friendship was as natural as a dog's might have been, and who worshiped him frankly and openly.

Mark had ever been something of a hero in David's eyes, and now he was further invested with the glamor of a romantic adventure as thrilling as any of Jeremiah's stories, and real. "Gosh," thought the boy—he would still think it, although he had almost conquered his habit of speaking the word aloud—"He's a hero, almost everybody saith so.

And I know him!" His interest was shared between the man and his work. He had abandoned all hope of being a wrestler and was now wavering between the desire to follow the trade of blacksmith and that of motor mechanic, and he lent his sturdy little strength at the bellows, chattering continually. Boylike he asked innumerable questions and occasionally these touched on matters which Mark wished to forget, as the time when he suddenly demanded, "It's lots of fun to shoot off a pistol, isn't it, Mark?"

"Yea," responded the man, startled into answering without consideration.

"I just bet that it is! I love to hear 'em go *bang*, but I don't think that I should like to shoot a man, although I might shoot an Indian, to make him good."

"'To make him good?'" repeated Mark, in bewilderment.

"Yea." Seriously. "Jeremiah saith that the only good Indians are dead ones. But I don't just see how that can be, for if they're bad when they're alive they won't go to heaven when they're dead, and the Bible saith that . . . that the other place—you know—is for the wicked."

"I think that Friend Jeremiah hath been telling thee fairy stories again, Davie," smiled Mark.

"Thou really and truly didst not shoot the city man, didst thou?"

"Nay. I really and truly did not."

The boy appeared somewhat disappointed, but he slipped his smutty little hand into the man's, as he answered, "'Course not. Although Friend Dyer Dexter saith that he is not so sure. I heard him tell sister Faith so, last evening. Ouch, Mark, thou art hurting my fingers."

There was another visitor either at the smithy or the Gray homestead, almost daily, whose calls cheered the young man greatly. It was Jack Hibbard, who had returned to his labors after driving Means to his apartment in Philadelphia and there surrendering him into the charge of his physician and a trained nurse. Before leaving him, Hibbard had very frankly stated that he utterly disbelieved his story and hoped that he would come to his senses and retract it before the case came to trial. They had parted enemies. Hibbard brought back with him one of his regular assistants and was at last thoroughly enjoying his semi-outing, especially the time which he spent with Mark and the smith, when he came into the village for mail and provisions in the early evenings. The young Quaker, for his part, was deeply touched by his friendship.

Others, too, made a point of speaking to him—little sentences of friendly encouragement which daily forged new links in the new tie which was binding him closer to his neighbors. Their remarks were often awkwardly expressed and halting, but the more sincere on that account.



So, without further incident, passed the week and most of another "First Day." The morrow with its final test was almost at hand!

The Sabbath afternoon was again unseasonably hot and sultry. Towards evening a faint breeze sprang up from the east, and John Gray went so far contrary to the established custom of the village as to open partially the blinds of the front window of the small living-room to obtain the benefit of it. Sister Patience and Mark were seated with him, and he was reading aloud comforting and strengthening passages from the Psalms, selected especially for the youth's sake, as Mark well knew.

It was rather dim and very peaceful in the room, and Mark had fallen into a reverie which, under the soothing influence of the smith's deep, droning voice, had approached the verge of drowsiness filled with pleasant thoughts. He had deliberately put from his mind worry over the morrow, and, having swept his heart clean, obeyed the injunction contained in the parable and filled its place with dreams of Faith. He had seen her that morning in the Meeting House. She had been unnaturally pale and her face looked almost thin. Yet oh, how sweet she had appeared—especially when she had once lifted her bowed head for an instant, caught his eye fixed almost devouringly upon her, and smiled. It was a faint smile, scarcely enough to cause the purple shadow of a dimple to appear in her cheek, but it held a world of love. If she were



only with him now; if he could only hold her close and kiss back some rosy color into her cheeks!

Suddenly Mark felt himself start, without knowing why. A quiver ran through his whole body and his nerves twitched, inexplicably, in the old way. What was it? Certainly nothing had happened, and his thoughts had not strayed from their pleasant path. His father was still reading, and the only other sound was the scarcely audible purr of a distant automobile. That was it! His hearing, sensitized to the noises of a machine, had caught a slight unevenness in the sound, a faint knocking. He had heard its like before—from the motor of the big car owned by Robert Means. Of course this one might not be his, but . . . Mark remained leaning forward, tensely.

Something caused both the smith and Sister Patience to look up at him, and what they saw brought an expression of trouble into both their faces.

The on-coming car flashed by the window, leaving a cloud of dust in its wake. Mark sank back in his chair, with his heart, which had been in his throat, sinking like lead. His strange premonition had been right. The machine was Means' and the man himself was driving it—back to Content. His return could have but one significance. He had recovered from his injury and was returning to carry through his false charge on the morrow. All hope that he might repent of his evil straightway

vanished from Mark's heart. It was his word against that of his accuser, and all the circumstantial evidence was black against him.

The happy thoughts departed, not again to return to comfort him. Bitter brooding filled their empty places. Well, after all, knowledge of the worst was better than uncertainty. Now he could steel his soul anew for the trial. Mark smiled, grimly.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE BREAKING-POINT

ROBERT MEANS had, indeed, returned to press his charge against the man who had incurred the bitterest enmity which he had ever felt towards any one. His final determination to go back to Content had not been reached until that very noon, and several considerations entered into it; anger, vanity, and something else quite different from either of these.

His wound had been almost insignificant, less even than Hibbard had believed—merely a gouge across the flesh of his upper leg. But it had confined him, first to his bed and then to his rooms, for six days—days which had been hell for him, and which he had made a hell for his man, and his nurse who had packed up and left on the third of them.

He was not used to bearing physical pain, but it was, perhaps, the least of his worries. The surgeon had strictly forbidden him the use of alcoholic stimulants and, at the start, he had been frightened into compliance with the direction by the doctor's warning of what might follow if he failed to obey. He had not made known his return to the city to any of his boon companions, and had been utterly

alone and indescribably lonely. Ennui had always been the ban of Means' butterfly existence, and as the hours and days dawdled by, he had felt that it would drive him mad, stark mad.

His mental discomfiture had been bred of this loneliness and another thought—that he had made a complete fool of himself and really deserved what he had got. There are few men who can face that sobering realization squarely, and accept it philosophically. Means certainly was not of the temperament to do so. It maddened him. He had let himself in for a scrape from which there was only one way out, and that a most unpleasant one. Of course he could not confess his lie; that was out of the question for one of his nature. He had got to go through with the thing and appear in court against that Quaker fellow, and a most distasteful experience it was going to be. He had already been notified to attend the trial on the following Monday, had conferred with his attorney, of course telling him the same story he had told Hibbard, and received the assurance that he was sure to win. It was not exactly a comforting assurance, but at least it held a grain of satisfaction. He would be getting even with a vengeance for the blow which had been dealt him.

Yes, he had got to go through with it! If he welched now, Hibbard would spread the story abroad, discrediting him and making him the laughing-stock, or worse, of all his acquaintances. Be-



sides, if he did not, that damned Quaker cub might sue him for false arrest and he would be up against the same thing, eventually. No, he had got to go on. Time and again Means had gone through this same mental process, writhing inwardly, and he had always reached the same conclusion.

There had been another consideration which entered into his decision, although he had been well aware that reason played no part in it. But then, reason seldom did weigh against his impulses.

He doubly wanted to clear his own skirts and put Mark Gray out of the way, if only because of Faith Franklyn. It amazed and angered him to discover what a hold the simple Quaker girl had taken upon his imagination. Instead of forgetting her, he knew that the desire to see her again was growing daily, out of all proportion with anything which he had ever felt before. It had become almost an obsession at length. Here was something which he apparently could not have. Certainly his wealth would not buy it, and he felt the sting of his complete failure to arouse her by means of his own fascination and studied attentions. He wanted her, fiendishly. Of course the desire might pass quickly with possession, but that consideration had no bearing upon his thoughts.

Repeatedly he tried to put the memory of her out of his mind. He told himself that he was an idiot. Why should she mean anything to him, anyway? He told himself that the whole affair was prepos-

terous—the idea of him, Robert Means who had played with women in almost every quarter of the globe, in a week's time losing his head over an ugly costumed, simple-minded, "thee and thou" Quaker girl. Preposterous! Of course it was. He reminded himself that, however much he might have tasted of forbidden fruit and been guilty of treading the rose-strewn paths of dalliance, he had never quite forgotten that he was a gentleman; never quite become a cad. A hundred kindred things he had told himself over and over during the lonely hours of his shut-in days, and the lonelier hours of the long, sleepless nights. Always his thoughts returned intensified to the girl herself, so bewitchingly sweet, so strongly desired because so seemingly unattainable.

Means was losing his grip upon himself, and, worst of all, he knew it. His nerves were as taut-strung, quivering wires, and a flock of past sins had returned to perch upon them, like blackbirds, weighing them down to the breaking point.

It had been bad enough while fear of consequence kept him sober. It was infinitely worst when he had thrown caution to the winds and began to drink. His dreams had been filled with her face; always fair, sometimes repelling him with a look of scarcely concealed contempt, but more often utterly indifferent. It aroused the devil within him. Better dislike than indifference.

Periods of actual remorse would follow, bring-

ing with them saner thoughts, and again brief moments of wondering whether he might not actually win her love. Having nothing else to do but think, he would set himself seriously to planning out imaginary moves in a game, the goal of which was the Quaker girl's heart. And as often he would end with a cynical laugh at his own idiocy. He was a fool. What was she to him, anyway? Always the answer came—a woman, beautiful, therefore to be desired and conquered. So, over and over until the obsession was complete and he could think and dream of nothing else. By the end of the week he had made up his mind that he was going to see Faith Franklyn again, whatever happened.

The climax came Sunday morning. Means had spent a wretched night, his nerves were going completely to pieces. Whiskey, taken straight, and morphine had wrecked his last bit of self-control; his new obsession was completely master of him. The border-line of temporary insanity had been reached. And again he knew it, and cursed the drawn and haggard man whose unnatural eyes and twitching lips were reflected back to him from his mirror.

He would drive, alone, back to Content; his wound had healed so that he could get about with merely a slight limp. Come what might, he would see Faith Franklyn. Perhaps that would be sufficient. The sight of the flesh and blood girl who—reason still insisted, although in vain—was nothing but an un-



interesting country chit, might banish from his diseased imaginings the image which had come to assume in them almost divinity, tempting enough to drive a man mad.

Besides, he had got to be in the next town on the following morning for the trial of Mark Gray, and, having seen her, could drive thither unless Hibbard would permit him to spend the night in the camp. Means meant to visit it, in any event, for some of his belongings were still there. If the other man were still hostile, well and good. He could be just as ugly; in fact he took unpleasant satisfaction in forming invectives to hurl at his former friend, and even hoped that they might come to blows.

The fifty mile drive in the open air cooled Means down a little. He drove at a furious pace, and the physical exercise furnished a temporary relief for his nerves so that he was in fairly good shape, for the time being, when he reached his destination. The tent on the hillside and then the Franklyn farmhouse appeared in view. With the sight of it came again the quickening thrill, and all the former thoughts concerning her crowded back into his brain. He was bewitched.

The driveway gate had been left open. Means swung the big car sharply about and entered the farmhouse yard. Directly before him, and alone, was the girl whom he sought.

It had been so uncomfortably hot within the house that Faith had finally yielded to the insistent



begging of the children that they be permitted to take a quiet walk in the meadows, and she had likewise come out, to sit upon the bench beneath the great elm, ostensibly to read her Bible and commune with the Spirit. At that instant her clasped hands rested on a closed Book, but her thoughts might have been called mundane except that pure love is in itself akin to religion. Her mind was so far detached from the present that, although she turned her startled eyes upon the intruder, they still held an expression of such dreamy affection that Means' blood surged hotly through his brain. It made no difference that thoughts of another, as he well knew, had called the look into existence.

Faith sprang to her feet so suddenly that the Bible fell from her lap to the grass. Her cheeks flushed deeply and then blanched, while the expression of horror and contempt, which he had seen in her phantasmal face, crept over her countenance. She started to run to the house, but was too late. Means had already brought the machine to a stop and stepped out of it, directly in front of her. She stiffened and faced him, courageously.

Means made up his mind as to the part which he should act, on the instant. He took a step forward, limping a good deal more than was necessary. There was no need for him to simulate a haggard expression, for it was already present and very real. Unconsciously the girl's eyes turned upon his injured leg, with a momentary look of pain and sym-

pathy. It quickly gave place to one of cold hostility, however, and his heart burned.

The man began to speak at once, using a low, troubled, and appealing tone. "Please do not look at me like that, Miss Franklyn. I had to come back here—and it was not altogether because of the trial, which is set down for to-morrow. Please believe me when I tell you that I would give a year of my life to have that day stricken from the calendar. I'm terribly sorry—I'm afraid that I cannot begin to make you understand how sorry I am for . . . for everything."

Faith raised her hand as though to check him, but he merely stepped closer and continued, hurriedly, "It's true. It would be true even if I had never known you, but the brief moments of friendly companionship which I was able to enjoy with you, a week ago, meant everything to me. You can't know how much they meant, or how much I covet your friendship. Why, it's more to me than anything in the world!"

Means was a natural actor, but now he was not merely acting; he was living his part and was convinced that what he said was true. Perhaps it really was. Men are strange creatures at the best—or worst. In any event, a note of real sincerity sounded through his voice, and it made the girl pause.

"I . . ." she began, and stopped, not knowing what to say.

“Yes. I understand something of what your feelings must be towards me. Probably I should not blame you for believing the young man’s account of what happened a week ago, rather than mine. But I would rather not talk about that until I have to, to-morrow. I am willing to say this much—to you—however. I was in a very considerable degree to blame for the . . . the accident. I wasn’t wholly myself; I confess it, to my shame and sorrow, and I have ceased to be vindictive towards him. Can a man say more than that?”

Faith hesitated. The man sounded sincere and contrite. If he were, it was clearly her duty to forgive, and here might be her opportunity to help Mark. Her face lost its intense look of dislike.

“Yea. Man can do more than that—more is commanded him.”

“What? I would do almost anything . . . for your sake.” Means pressed forward, speaking eagerly.

“Nay, not for mine. Thy speech hath a hint of charitableness, and charity is the greatest of virtues. But it must be founded on truth, not self-interest. I may have wronged thee in my heart by thinking too harshly of thee, but Mark Gray doth not desire forgiveness, but justice, I have heard his account of the matter as well as thine—and his is true. I know it, and so dost thou.” As Faith spoke Mark’s name a blush mantled her cheeks, but she did not lower her eyes, which were now large, dark

and almost flaming. Her excitement intensified her loveliness, and it was all that Means could do to restrain himself from catching her in his arms. His blood was on fire; his brain whirled. He was losing all control of himself once more.

"Wait. Wait, Miss Franklyn . . . Faith. You've got to hear me now. I don't know what story he has told; I scarcely know what I said, or did, myself. I . . . I wasn't myself that night. I'm willing to admit that I provoked the quarrel with him, and that the shooting was wholly accidental. I'll promise to say as much in court, to-morrow, and retract my charge if you will only . . ."

"What have I to do with it?" she interrupted to demand, sternly. "The truth shouldst not be an object of barter—and thou hast not yet told the truth. If thou hast a conscience . . ."

"I know." Means was fast slipping. "I am no saint, but my conscience is not wholly dead. There is a spark of it left which you could fan back to life with your friendship. Please give it to me! Please help me, now!" He reached out his hand to her. Startled anew, she tried to avoid him and run to the house. But Means caught her wrist and drew her sharply to him. The touch of his fingers on her flesh had swept away his last atom of control. *This* was what he had come back for.

Faith was white and her lips set. She was very frightened, but she would not show the fact. She was tugging hard to release her hand from his



grasp when David's eager voice again caused a blessed interruption. He dashed around the corner of the barn, followed at a few yards by little Hope. The lad was waving something wildly above his head. Man and woman were equally startled when he drew closer, somewhat more slowly after he had caught sight of the intruder, and they saw that he held in his chubby hand a glistening revolver, the replica of the one which Mark had possessed.

Instantly the same thought flashed into the mind of each. The boy had somehow fallen upon the missing weapon, which Means had declared he had sought at the gravel pit and failed to find, and Mark had said his opponent had fired at him in the meadow. The man dropped Faith's arm, and took an impulsive step towards David, holding out his hand. David ignored it and addressed his sister with boyish excitement "Look, Faith! See what I have found. It is verily the other pistol, just like the one I found in Mark's pocket. Can I keep it, sister Faith? Findings is . . ."

"Just where didst thou find it, Davie? Tell me." Her voice was trembling and as full of excitement as his own.

"In the further pasture, a little way beyond the gravel pit. I was looking for the nest of a field swallow which I saw start up from a clump of grass, and my foot kicked right against it. Why dost thou look so funny. May I . . ."

"Give it to me, David," she cried, reaching out her hand. With crestfallen countenance the lad surrendered his treasure to her, and she hastily slipped it into the front of her dress beneath the white kerchief. Faith was trembling all over, and the touch of the steel against the flesh was terrifying to her, but her courage held firm.

The sight of the revolver and David's disclosure had steadied Means, temporarily. With an assumption of innocence he said, "I wonder if you had not better let me have that weapon, Miss Franklyn. It is dangerous."

"Nay. I shall keep it."

"Indeed!" Again passion was as suddenly shaking him, making him speak hastily and without forethought. "Suppose that I should tell you that I believe that it is my property?"

"I should answer that I am sure that it is."

The man gave a harsh laugh. "I thought that Quakers still kept the Ten Commandments. One of them runs, 'thou shalt not steal,' if I remember."

Faith's eyes flashed ominously. "I am not stealing. If thou canst identify this weapon as thy property, it shall be returned to thee—in court, to-morrow. I think that the judge who tries thy case will be glad to see it, and hear just where it was found—not in the gravel pit, where thou saidst it fell from thy hand when Mark Gray knocked thee down . . ." oh, the biting sarcasm with which

she spoke those words . . . "but rather in the field, where *he* saith that thou attacked him murderously. Come David."

Seizing the boy's hand she turned towards the house.

"Not so fast, my lady. I think that I will have that revolver now." Means was at her side, with his hand on her wrist again. Every other idea was banished by the one thought, "I must get possession of that revolver!"

"Thou shalt not have it!"

Means seized the girl roughly and started to tear at her dress front where the weapon was concealed. Faith cried out, and the next second a diminutive eight-year old fury—David—had butted his head viciously into the pit of the man's stomach and was kicking at his shins with all the strength of a sturdy leg.

Means uttered a cry of pain. He released Faith and swung on the lad, knocking him to the ground with a sweeping blow of his arm. Then he turned back—to find himself looking straight into the muzzle of his own revolver. It was wavering, but aimed at his heart. Behind it he saw a new face; not the calm countenance of the Quaker girl, Faith Franklyn, but of primitive womanhood, at bay and deadly. Her cheeks were colorless and, by contrast, the two eyes which actually glared forth from beneath her disarranged hair seemed black as coals just kindling. Her dress and kerchief were torn partly

away from the base of her neck, revealing a touch of her swiftly rising and falling bosom.

Means laughed, madly.

David got to his feet again, shrilling out, "Shoot him! Kill him, sister Faith! Pull with thy finger of the little stick underneath." The boy sprang forward, beside himself with rage. But, before he could reach Faith, Means had turned and dodged behind his automobile. He was not afraid that the girl would deliberately fire upon him, but only God knew what would happen if the boy should reach the weapon and either pull the trigger himself, or cause her to do so.

The incident was ended. So weak that she could scarcely walk, Faith hurried the children—both of whom were now crying, David from anger and Hope from terror—into the house and closed and locked the door. Means climbed into his machine and drove crazily up the cart path and across the field towards the tent.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE GREATER VICTORY

IN the small front room of the Gray homestead the smith had continued his quiet reading after that brief and startling interlude. But the look of hatred which had passed over Mark's face remained in his mind, and he suddenly turned from the Psalms to the New Testament and began to read from the Sermon on the Mount.

“‘Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother. and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him. lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.’”

He stopped and laid the book to one side.

"How can I agree with mine adversary, if he wilt not?" demanded Mark.

"Not facts but purposes are what count in God's sight, my son. Christ again spoke in a parable, for the better understanding of the multitude. The judge and the officer were but symbols. He was more direct in the first of the verses which I have read thee from the Apostle Matthew. 'First be reconciled with thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' All men are our brothers."

"I know." Mark was still argumentative. "But He also said, 'Whosoever is angry with his brother *without just cause.*' Have I not cause?"

"Yea. All the greater credit shall be thine if, having cause, thou forgivest him. Hast thou forgotten the words spoken upon the cross—the text upon which our faith is founded—'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?' "

"A Christ could say it. But a man . . . Nay, my spirit is still contentious—it still kicks against the pricks of conscience. But thou are right, father. I may win over him in the law court, but I have still greater need to win the greater victory over myself. If thou dost not mind, I think that I shall go and walk quietly by myself for a little while."

"Yea. Go, my son."

A half-hour had passed. Robert Means sat alone within the tent on the hillside, upon the cot bed which

had once been his, but which was now covered with the scattered possessions of a stranger. He had considered himself fortunate to find the place empty—the assistant had returned to Philadelphia for the week-end and Hibbard had likewise returned home.

An almost empty whiskey bottle stood on the floor at his feet; but neither drink nor morphine had brought the desired calm to his outraged nerves or his shaken mind, which had become a kaleidoscope for unstable bits of thought, many hued but all of them dark. He had run his shaking fingers so often through his hair that disarranged strands of it fell over his moist forehead; his face was pasty in color, except for a crimson spot on either cheek; his eyes were blurred beneath their drooping lids. The tent flap was open to the West and the fast descending sun, turning blood-color as it neared the horizon hills, shone full in his face. To his distorted brain it appeared like a glaring evil eye, and he cursed it.

Suddenly a form blotted out the light. Means looked up, scowling. He had been expecting to have Hibbard return, and was ready to provoke a violent quarrel with him, without reason.

He started, violently. His eyes widened and fear took lodgment in them. For the tent opening was blocked by the big form of Mark Gray.

Means sank back upon the bed, supporting himself by his trembling hands thrust behind him. His visitor did not speak, and he finally managed to

gasp, in husky tones, "Wha . . . what the hell are you doing here?"

"I saw thee pass my home, and I followed thee hither," rejoined Mark, evenly. Means had heard that impersonal voice before, and feared it.

"My God!" he said, under his breath.

There was a moment of silence which seemed to him eternal. He broke it, at length, by crying out in an agony of terror. "Well, say something, can't you? Speak! Damn. Damn, I can't stand this silence." Means' nervous system was in complete revolt.

Mark regarded him with real pity, for he was beginning to understand. The sight sickened him. A grown man cringing and showing the white feather was not a pleasant sight, but it gave him an exultant feeling for just an instant. He conquered it, speedily, but the recollection of his many hours of anguish was a long way towards being wiped out. At the first sight of his adversary inside the tent, the old anger had swelled within his heart; his big fingers had itched to close about his neck, and to conquer the impulse he had been forced to keep his hands so tightly clasped that the knuckles of the intertwined fingers showed white under the drawn skin. But now that feeling was gone. Only a contemptuous pity remained in him.

"Yea, I can speak," he said slowly. "I came here to speak with thee, and it will not take me long to say my say."



Means cringed again; a visible shudder passed through him.

“Nay, thou hast no need to be afraid. I have not come to hurt thee.”

The words and the tone in which they were spoken acted as an unpleasant but effective stimulant to Means' shaken nerve. They indicated, clearly enough, that the Quaker regarded him as a coward—him, Robert Vandervetter Means, scion of one of the oldest families in Philadelphia! He sharply pulled himself together, and responded with a show of bravado and an insulting laugh, “Afraid? Of you? Well, hardly! If you've got anything important to say, say it quick, and clear out. I warn you . . .”

Mark lifted his hand, “Yea, I shall speak—and go. First, I have been a man of wickedness. I have sinned against thee openly by striking thee, and in my heart by hating thee. I am sorry. I want thee to know that I now harbor no ill-will against thee for aught which thou hast done in the past, and humbly and sincerely I ask thy pardon for all that I have done and thought.”

He bowed his head and fixed his eyes on the ground, with the result that he did not see Means straighten up, nor the expression of astonishment and unbelief which came over his countenance. The other stood up, on feet so unsteady that he had to catch hold of the edge of the bed with his left hand to retain his balance. His right was thrust out for

the same purpose, and Mark, now lifting his eyes, saw it and advanced his own, hesitatingly, as though to grasp it. Suddenly Means gave a laugh, partly of relief, partly because the situation had become so utterly ludicrous in his mind. But it was sarcastic, grating laughter, and Mark withdrew his hand in haste and compressed his lips.

With exaggerated mock politeness Means said, "Yes? That is the first thing—and I must say that it does great credit to you. And now what, if I may be so bold as to inquire, is the other?"

Mark sternly held himself in check, and replied in the same low, even voice, "I also came in the hope that I might agree with thee, who hast been mine adversary, so that on the morrow thou wouldst be glad to retract the untrue charge which thou, in the heat of passion, made against me. Wilt thou not do so, and thus clear thine own conscience of sin and my name of the stain at one and the same time?"

The other man looked full and insultingly at him from head to foot. His lips twisted into a sneer and his eyes took on a cold and ugly expression. Again he laughed, loudly. "Yea, I wilt not! Do you think I'm a fool, to let you off like that just because you come here whining like a whipped cur. I've stood a lot from you, you damned thieving Quaker. No man can steal my liquor, insult me, strike me, and then get off scott free." Means' speech was raging now. "To-morrow I'm going to send you to

jail . . . do you hear that? . . . to jail, for assault. And now get out of here, you . . .” the unprintable epithet again passed his lips, and he blindly swung at Mark with his clinched fist. Fright had sobered him for a moment, but the reaction brought about by the Quaker’s pacificatory words had swung his brain, crazed with drugs, completely off its balance. Reason fled from him. He saw red. Only one idea could permeate his mind—the man before him was a coward, after all, and for all his size and strength. Who but a craven would come like this, whining for mercy? He had forgotten the sledgehammer blow with which Mark had felled him at the gravel pit; he had forgotten their struggle in the meadow and the terrific twist which the other had given to his arm as he flung him aside as though he had been an infant. His one thought was, “He is a coward, a coward, a coward. I struck him once before and he meekly let me do it again.”

Means lurched forward and repeated the blow full on Mark’s face, cursing him thickly.

The old volcano of passion seethed within the Quaker’s heart, but he would not let it burst into eruption. His muscles ached to flex and deliver a counter-blow, but he held them in check, turned deliberately and walked steadily out of the tent. To the crazed man behind him his act was unbearably insulting, far worse than a blow could have been. Still swearing, he started to follow. His foot struck against the nearly emptied bottle, overturning it.

Almost all of the remainder of the whiskey flowed out, and he swore again.

Mark was several yards away, moving with unhurried, measured steps. The other seized the bottle by its neck, and hurled it after the departing man. It passed his head and crashed to splinters against a stone in front of him. Mark heard his would-be assailant stumbling behind him in pursuit. Without looking back, he ran, and for the third time heard Means' mocking laughter.

At length he was safe, alike from the other man and himself, and he slowed down to a walk and headed homewards. He had failed in half of his mission, yet his soul felt strangely comforted and at peace, for he knew that he had conquered his anger at last. He had not killed his defiler and assailant, but rather run from him. And thereby won the greater victory.



## CHAPTER XXVI

“WHAT IS BRED IN THE BONE—”

WHEN, a few moments later, Mark opened the door of his own home and entered the front room it was his turn to be surprised.

“Faith!” he cried out. “*Thou* art here?”

His father answered, eagerly. “Yea, the dear girl hath come, bearing good news for thee, and all of us. She could not let us go to our beds this night without lightening our hearts by imparting it to us.”

“What is it, Faith?” begged Mark, his face glowing.

Faith told him—not all that had occurred when Means arrived within the yard, by any means, but all about David’s appearance with the missing weapon, his report as to where he had found it and the other’s admission that it belonged to him. With happiness shining forth from her own eyes, she added that she had it safe and would produce it in the court and make affirmation to the same story there.

Mark sat down, speechless with relief, and the smith lifted his hands and exclaimed, “Now may the Lord indeed be praised for his justice and mercy

towards us. His ways are beyond human comprehension; he maketh babes his agents to discover the truth. Yea, the Lord be praised."

"Amen and amen," responded Sister Patience, tears running unheeded down her furrowed cheeks.

"The light is breaking again, Mark, the morning of thy deliverance is at hand. Thou hast done well, and borne thyself with fortitude and self-restraint of late and my many fears on thine account are fast vanishing."

"Surely thy commendation is dear to me, father," answered the other. "Verily, I have been trying hard and . . . and have, I think, just now overcome an impulse to act hastily, but that doth not change the fact that my heart is still unruly and even on this First Day it hath been burning with terrible wrath." He went on to describe his visit to Means, simply and rather blaming himself for his anger than boasting over his physical control. It was not easy for Mark to speak. Except when he was under the spell of strong excitement, when his words fairly poured out, he was a halting conversationalist like most men of action. Now he grew red and uncomfortable.

When he had concluded, the smith arose, towering above him. Laying his broad hand on Mark's shoulder he said, solemnly, "My son, it appeareth that we have still more for which to be thankful. Thou hast in truth gained a noble victory for the side of Christ this afternoon."

"Yea, it is so. I am proud of thee, Mark." As Faith added her words of commendation she crossed the room and, sitting down in a chair beside him, gently laid her hand upon both of his which were clasped in his lap.

Mark flushed still further.

"Perhaps. I hope that it is so." He hesitated and his face grew troubled. Slowly shaking his head and keeping his eyes fixed on his feet he began to speak again, haltingly at first, but soon with a passionate impetuosity as though he could no longer keep his disturbing thoughts to himself.

"Yea, I hope so. But I greatly fear that my having checked the urgings of my inner nature this once meaneth but little. The impulse to seize the man and dash him upon the ground was in my heart, as it had been many times previous. It is the thought of that which troubleth me beyond words, and maketh me afraid that I shall never be free from these sudden temptations to act violently. They come over me all in an instant, and with such force that unless I have steeled my will in advance—as to-day—they overcome me, and I act before I can think. I may be sorry the next moment, but of what good is that? The evil is done. All the remorse in the world cannot cure it then."

Faith pressed his hand and would have spoken, but he only continued the more impetuously, "Nay, it is true. Hour after hour I have thought upon this, during the past week, and daily grown more

and more troubled. I think that I would rather die than to say this, Faith, but I must say it. How can I ever honestly seek thy love, and thee, while I am as I am? I cannot; I cannot. Oh, what is the matter with me? Others do not act as I do, and, although I have no way of knowing, I truly believe that they cannot feel as I feel.

“I cannot hope to make you understand. I have no words to explain it, but there seemeth to be a force like a mighty flood within me. The storms of sudden passion cause it to rise and I am instantly swept away by it; my will is like a paper barrier against it. You cannot know the tenth—nay, not the hundredth—part of the impulses which are daily attacking me, forcing me to do things which seem strange, some of them trivial, some appalling. Surely there is something wrong with me, something different from that which prompteth the actions of other men—thine, father, and those of our neighbors. I cannot understand it! O God, what is the trouble with me!”

With a smothered groan, close to a sob, Mark shook off Faith's hand and covered his face. Sister Patience was weeping softly. Otherwise the silence which followed was complete. Faith was very pale, John Gray nearly as white as she, and he looked aged and drawn.

In little more than a whisper, and as though speaking only to himself, the smith at length said, “‘What is bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh.’”



Verily, the proverb is true. I know little concerning the opposing laws of heredity and environment, but surely the blood of our forebears calls with a mighty voice. Only one power exceeds it—the power of God.”

Mark and Faith both looked up at him in bewilderment.

“What art thou saying? What dost thou mean?” asked the former.

“Thy confession was hard, but I have one which is still harder to make, my boy. I have not been honest with thee, Mark. All thy life I have been acting a lie towards thee—as Sister Patience and all of the older generation in Content know. Oh, I thought it a venial sin—I pretended that it was that thou mightest be spared the heart-aches which might have followed knowledge of the truth. But now I wonder if my deceit hath not done thee more harm than good; if that doth not always follow, sooner or later. ‘He visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children, even unto the third and fourth generation.’ Nay, that is not strictly true, in this case.”

“What . . . ?” Mark would have stood up, but the heavy hand of the other still rested upon his shoulder and held him in his chair.

“Wait. I shall tell thee all, now, as I should have told thee long ago; as soon as thou came to the age of understanding. Yea, I should have told thee. Forewarned is forearmed, I should not have

forgotten that. I thought to help, but I have injured thee. If thou hadst known the source of thy seemingly strange and unnatural impulses thou mightest, with God's help, have more easily overcome them. My love for thee is mine only excuse, and the wish to spare thee knowledge of the unjust reproach which was once borne by . . ."

"By whom?" demanded Mark, hot and cold by turns.

"Be patient, Mark," interrupted the weeping housekeeper. "He wilt tell thee, now, in good time."

"'Patient!' How can I when . . ."

John Gray had left his side and was now walking ponderously across the room to the old secretary which stood in the corner where it had been since the days of Mark's childhood—a thing of semi-mystery. He took a tarnished key from one drawer thereof, and with it unlocked a smaller one. Then he paused, and stood with head bowed as though in earnest prayer.

When he faced them again he held in his hand two small photographs. One of them he passed to Mark, who took it, hesitatingly. The young man had to force himself to look at it, and his vision became suddenly misty as he saw a faded, sweet, young face from which the eyes seemed to look up into his with a calm and loving gaze.

"I know," he said. "She . . . she was my mother."

“Yea, thy mother, Mark—one of the purest, loveliest women who ever walked, for a brief time, upon this earth.” John Gray took the photograph back in his hand, and let his eyes rest lingeringly upon it. Then he passed the other one to Mark, who regarded it with surprise and incomprehension.

Certainly he had never seen that pictured face before, yet there was something singularly familiar about it, too. What he looked upon was the eager, joyous portrait of a man of about his own age, although the curling mustache which he wore made him seem slightly older. His hair, parted on the side, fell in unrebuked natural waves across his broad forehead, the lips smiled, and there was a noticeable cleft in his firm chin. It was a virile countenance, not really handsome, but pleasant and frank. Suddenly Mark felt his heart-beat quicken strangely. He *had* seen a countenance strangely like that, a thousand times—at least he had seen its image in the glass.

“That,” said the smith, slowly, “was thy father.”

## CHAPTER XXVII

“WILL NEVER COME OUT OF THE FLESH.”

“MY . . . my father?” repeated Mark, while Faith started up in an amazement equaling his own. “Why . . . why, father, what doth thou mean? I do not understand.”

“It is true. Wait. I have told thee that thou shouldst hear the whole story now. It is true that thou art also *my* son—the child of my heart and legally my heir by adoption. Thy mother was my dearly beloved wife. But thou wert bred of the man whose picture thou holdest in thine hand. He was thy real father, and the father of all those violent impulses which have so troubled us, and distressed thee since thou hast grown to years of understanding. Yet thou shouldst not blame him, for he was—like thyself—a victim of his heredity, and child of an environment as unlike thine as black is unlike white. Knowing, now, the temptations which assail thee, brought up as thou hast been under my watchful care and with all the advantages of a Quaker training, I can the more readily understand his acts, and forgive them—if that were necessary.

“Nay, do not look at me in that manner, Mark. There is no reason why thou shouldst be horrified,



or hang thy head in shame. He did no evil thing; broke no law of God's imposing. A pure and great love cannot be born of wickedness, and he loved thy mother . . . even as I loved her. She was his wife before she was mine."

Mark drew a breath of audible relief, and returned his gaze to the photograph. Strange emotions were at conflict within his heart, and he was scarcely conscious of the renewed pressure of Faith's hand on his.

"See, now, how strangely history repeateth itself," continued John Gray. He had nearly conquered the emotion which had been causing his voice to shake, and was calm, almost impersonal, again. "How often have I thought of the truth of that saying, too, during the recent days, when something strangely like the melodrama of play actors upon the stage hath been taking place here in our peaceful village, and whose end is not yet. It was forcibly impressed on the minds of many of us of the passing generation on that First Day morning, a fortnight ago, when thou, Mark, sprang to stop the horse which was on the point of running away with thee, Sister Faith, and thy family.

"But I am ahead of my story, and I know that thou art eager for facts, not an old man's fancies. Part of the tale, which is thine and mine alike, I know from personally sharing in it; part from what thy mother told me. It happened nearly a quarter of a century ago, and would seem scarcely

real to me, now, if it were not for thy presence and what thou art passing through. Thou art indeed thy father's son—in outward appearance and mental impulse."

Mark again looked down at the picture, and believed.

"His name was Will Morgan. He was from the plains of the Far West, bred and reared in an atmosphere of freedom from all restraints, a child of the out-of-doors with a will as uncircumscribed as the winds themselves. He lived on a ranch, with many broad acres of prairie land given over to the breeding of fine horses. He was, moreover, not only a most expert horseman himself, but a man of great agility and physical prowess; a deadly shot with rifle and revolver."

The young man's eyes suddenly kindled, and his breathing quickened. "Father," he cried, still addressing the smith as he always had addressed him. "Dost thou think it possible that ability even to use a pistol, can be inherited with the blood? I . . ."

"I have no doubt of it, my boy. What other explanation for what hath occurred in thy case is possible? And thou wilt soon see other evidences of this powerful law of heritage. Will Morgan was only a little older than thou art now, when he entered our lives. He had come to the East for the first time, following the call of his adventurous blood, for he ever loved to roam and see places

strange to him. His purpose was, in part, to bring on a shipment of his blooded stock for sale.

"It was all new and delightful to him, at first, but soon the crowded city became oppressive to him. He was in Philadelphia, no longer, alas, the 'city of brotherly love.' He longed for the freedom of the open air and the wide places."

"Yea, well I know that longing!" interrupted Mark, impulsively.

"It accounteth for much of thy restlessness of spirit, I doubt not, my son . . . my boy."

"Nay, father! Call me 'son.' "

"One morning—it was on a Saturday—he could stand it no longer, and mounting one of his own spirited horses he rode westward out of the teeming city, leaving his course to Fate, or those impulses by which he was ever guided. He stopped that night at a small town and started again at sunrise of the First Day, caring little where he rode so long as it was through the open country. Fate led him to . . . Content." The narrator paused, as though the recollection were painful to him.

"Friends were going to the Meeting House, just as they went this morning—most of us humbly afoot, but a few who, like Faith, lived at a distance, in wagons. Among the latter number were Friend Mark Leadbetter, who hath since died, and his only daughter, Charity . . . thy mother."

"Why," broke in Faith. "I did not know that. The Leadbetter place is next beyond mine own."



"The same. I used to go there as frequently as I dared, and know every tree, every bush along the way which Mark hath often trod of late. For thou must know that I, too, was young then . . . and . . . in love."

He stopped again, with bowed head, and Faith stretched out her free hand and laid it with infinite comfort and tenderness on his.

"How often memory hath carried me back to that day as I have watched thee, Mark, with difficulty suppressing thine eagerness as thou covertly watched for Faith to appear, driving meeting-wards down the same highway. In my time it was but a country road. Ah, youth! Gentile and Jew; Christian and infidel, we are all pagans then.

"Charity Leadbetter had cared for me from her childhood—I can say that truthfully. I believed that we would some day wed, and so did others. But now I know that I had touched her affections, merely; I had not stirred the depths of her heart and . . . I never did," he sadly added.

"On the First Day morning when her father's carry-all turned Smilie's corner I could not help but turn my head at the sound of their horses' hoof-beats, so distinctive to mine ears. I saw her sitting upon the front seat, so wholesome, fair to the eye, and demure. Then, like a bolt of lightning from the clear blue, occurred the event which shook the village to its foundations. Content had never known such excitement before, nor hath it known



it since . . . until thou, Mark, grew to manhood." For an instant there was the barest suggestion of a smile about the corners of the smith's lips.

"Just as that city man, Means, tore around the same corner in his automobile, so the young Will Morgan in his queer rainment—queer, that is to us—swept around it upon his foam-flecked, galloping horse. He was shouting aloud, and swinging his broad-brimmed felt hat madly—not because he was evil at heart and a Sabbath breaker, but from the sheer joy of living and of being in action. He little knew how he was outraging the ethics of our sect by behaving thus, especially upon a Meeting day.

"The pair which Friend Mark Leadbetter was driving were also spirited steeds, and the startling appearance of the stranger caused them instantly to break and run away. Thy grandfather, although a strong man himself, was powerless to control them, and they dashed madly past us as we stood, unable to move. *I have ever been slow to think and to act.*

"Then the stranger performed a brave and gallant act, even as thou didst, a fortnight ago. With wonderful skill he instantly checked his horse, causing it to stop in the midst of its mad gallop and swing about in the air while still rearing erect on its hind legs. Then, as the runaways overtook him, he fell in with the plunging off horse, leaned far out from his saddle and caught the rein

close to the bit. It stirreth my heart even to-day to recall that moment. Will Morgan was not shouting, now. The boyish smile had vanished from his countenance. His jaw had the same firm set, and his eyes the same intense light which I have sometimes seen in thine."

The look was in them at the moment. Mark was tense with strange excitement, feeling every emotion which his own father and his father by adoption must have felt, twenty-odd years before. Faith, too, was leaning slightly forward and breathing fast.

"The frightened horse was hard of mouth, and the rescuer's mount not trained for such work. It shied. Will Morgan was torn from the saddle and dragged some feet along the roadway. But his firm grasp was not to be broken and the pair came to a stop, terrified and heaving."

Mark visualized it all—such a rescue as Jeremiah had briefly described as having been seen by him upon the silver screen. And the hero had married the girl whom he had saved! So there had never been real life and stirring drama in Content! How little he had known.

"Thy mother was saved," continued the smith. "But her savior's clothing was sadly torn and his left leg twisted and horribly bruised. Just as Faith sprang from the carriage, two weeks ago, to take thy head upon her knees, so Charity then sprang from hers; for she, likewise, was always quick to

act with compassion for the suffering, and when her tender heart was touched. It was touched, then. The dashing bravery of the young stranger, together with his plight, stirred it as my simple love never could. She was truly a woman, and all true women love courage and pity those in pain.

“The man was suffering, but he smiled up into her face. I saw that smile, and the look in her gentle eyes, and my thankful heart grew suddenly heavy, even wickedly rebellious. Her father also got down, and thanked the stranger, grudgingly. I knew how he felt—bitter anger against him for his act which alike caused the runaway and profaned the Sabbath, and gratitude for the rescue which he had performed at the peril of his life. He could not help insisting upon taking the young man home: his Christian duty was clear and he was a deeply religious man, of a kind. But it was certain that it gave him small pleasure.”

“I never knew him, did I, father?” asked Mark.

“Nay. He died when thou wert a mere infant. The two took Will Morgan home and ministered unto him under the direction of our beloved physician, who was then little older than I. For two weeks he lay in their house, his leg so badly hurt that he could not bear his weight upon it. During that time Charity Leadbetter nursed him with the patience and tenderness of an angel. I need say no more: the inevitable cannot but happen. They were both young; even those who wear the Quaker gray often



cherish the rainbow colors of romance in their hearts; he loved thy mother on sight—perhaps it was mutual. Only He who knoweth the hearts of men can say.”

“Of course she did,” Faith answered, and quickly added, as she saw the expression of pain pass like a cloud-shadow over John Gray’s face, “Oh, I am sorry.”

“Thou needst not be. It was the will of God. Ah, well, that was years ago. Enough for me to say that I knew it soon, for I visited the house almost daily, hoping against hope. I also knew that thy mother, Mark, shortly read another message written in his soul—that he was big and clean, despite the outcroppings of a nature and an upbringing which were alike foreign enough to us of Content. Never, to the moment of his tragic death, did he fail her in that respect, nor cease to worship her, as I learned later.

“Will Morgan was frank and honest in his love for her. Before his convalescence was complete he acknowledged it both to her and to Friend Mark Leadbetter, asking him for Charity’s hand in marriage. It was then that thy grandfather made the same great mistake that hath been made by countless other parents, especially those whose viewpoint has been made narrow by living to themselves alone, and whose word has been law within their households. He refused him, and refused him with anger. I had the story from Will’s lips, for I could



not but be his friend, he was so manly and himself the spirit of friendliness. Thou hast that from him, too.

“He was an Old Testament man, thy grandfather. A Christian and a Friend by name, he patterned his life rather by the words of the patriarchs and prophets of the ‘thou shalt not’ religion. Never would he allow a daughter of his to wed a man of worldly mind and an unbeliever. Will Morgan had frankly confessed to us that he knew no God but Him who dwells in the waving grass of the wind-swept prairies, the templed hills, the pure running waters, the blazing heaven at noon-day, and the stars which shine at night. I understood, in part; thy mother, wholly. It was for her enough, although there never lived a more perfect Christian nor a truer Friend.

“Pleas and arguments—thy mother’s tears—were all in vain. Mark Leadbetter bitterly ordered the stranger to depart from his gates. He . . . he came to me. That night he passed in my room, pacing the floor, although his leg was barely healed and pained him grievously. He told me all. He said that Charity and he were as two parts of one soul, separated by a thousand miles at birth, but brought together by Fate or God . . . call the power what I would. I had to listen, with leaden heart, and calm him as best I could. I have no doubt that thou canst understand his feelings, Mark.”

"Yea. I think that I can well understand," answered the young man.

"I can never forget that night. Through the long hours, with only the cold moonlight illuminating the room, we argued as man to man and I saw his soul, stripped naked. My own was dead for the time—it died when he told me that Charity was determined as he; that if her father would not yield she would go with him in face of all. And I knew it was true.

"In the morning I went to Friend Mark Leadbetter and interceded for them. What else could I do? The woman's happiness was everything to me. I could not see her heart broken. It was useless. I earned their gratitude and his undying hatred, especially when they went away together openly, cursed from his threshold. Charity was of legal age, but he would have prevented her by force and done bodily injury to the man if I had not interfered. I was always strong," added the giant, simply.

"Yea, they went away . . . together. The sunlight went out of my life with them, for a time. The next day I received a little letter from thy mother. They had been married in Philadelphia."

The speaker paused again, and sat with closed eyes and slightly moving lips for a full minute. Then he said, "From that hour to the day of his death, Mark Leadbetter never so much as spoke his daughter's name." He was interrupted by an angry

exclamation from Mark and one of pity uttered by Faith.

"Yea. I have no doubt but that 'honor thy father and thy mother' was, in his mind, the greatest of all the commandments, and he felt that she had broken that one, whereas she had not. She continued to write him loving letters regularly. He never answered. He never even opened them, but threw them into the fire. Misguided by what he believed was 'principle,' Mark Leadbetter cast off his daughter, perhaps he banished her even from his thoughts . . . but nay, no father could do that, and no man who had ever known thy mother's love could ever forget her, even for an instant. I pitied him, for I know that none of his other children could ever fill her place in the home or in his affections, restricted as they were. Retaliation is a two-edged sword without a handle. He who seizes upon it, in anger's heat, always wounds himself worse than his other victim. Yea, always."

"Verily it is so. But forgiveness, which is love, is both a bridge to reunite, no matter how deep the breach which hath been made, and a balm to heal the hurt in one's own heart."

"Spoken like a true Friend, Faith," answered John Gray, and continued, "But I should speak no evil of the dead. The matter seemed to be ended. The months passed—slowly enough, for me—and memory of the sensation which had so stirred our village slowly faded. Even the wound in mine

own heart grew less painful; Time is the great physician. Then came another day when it was reopened suddenly. Thy mother returned to Content, alone."

Mark started and would have spoken, but the smith hurried on.

"She went directly to her father's house. He would not see her, nor allow her so much as to step her foot across the threshold, although I think that his bitter denial caused his death, a few months later. Yea, such men are more to be pitied than blamed."

"Nay, I say," cried Mark. "No punishment is great enough for them."

"Guard thy tongue, my son, and thy feelings as well. Thou hast uttered the hasty judgment of youth, which is merciless. Faith's words should have taught thee a lesson."

"I know. But she was my *mother*," answered the other, hotly.

"True. Well, doubtless he was bitterly punished. There are hells upon earth; the fires of conscience burn more fiercely than any kindled by man, and heart-aches are worse than any bodily pain. Confession and forgiveness is their only balm, as Faith hath said.

"But enough of that. Thou wert yet to be born to her, Mark, and, although she was plentifully supplied with money, her only thought had been to get home where loving tenderness might surround



her in her approaching trial. Denied by her father she would have gone away again in bitter sorrow but . . . God permitted me to find her. I . . . I brought her to my family who received her as a daughter, and in this house thou came into the world."

"No wonder that thou hast been as a father to me, always," Mark interjected. "But I do not understand. Where was . . . was my real father? Thou saidst . . ."

"I had forgotten, for the moment. A few weeks previous he had been killed—shot down by a band of horse thieves while defending his own."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mark and Faith, simultaneously.

"Thy mother could never bring herself to tell us all the details. Nor could we blame her, for she saw him murdered, even herself took part in fighting off the drunken raiders. In those few months she had become a child of the out-of-doors and he had taught her to shoot at a target, so it is not at all strange that thou shouldst have inherited the love of fire-arms and the ability to use them naturally. Will Morgan died in her arms, blessing her for the love which she had given him, for their brief life together had been one of sunshine with but one cloud in it—the knowledge of her father's anger. And that hung over her spirit until the night, two years after thy birth, when she followed him into the Great Beyond."

There was another period of silence, during which

all in the little room were busy with their own varied thoughts. Then John Gray sighed deeply, shook his heavy head and spoke again.

"There is little more to tell thee. I had never ceased loving her for an instant, and her helpless presence in our home rekindled the embers. She, too, had always cared for me. I did all within my power to lighten her burden and make her lot happier—as did my mother and Sister Patience, who had come to dwell with us. But there were many in Content who treated us all coldly at that time."

"Of course," said Mark. "I know them."

"It made no difference. They changed when we were married, and her gratitude was my reward. Yea, it was gratitude and the thought of thee which caused her to accept my love, I am certain. She was never really well, again, and she knew that thou wouldst need a father's care. We were wed when thou wert about a year old, and were happy together, for a little time. With her it was the quiet happiness, which comes with peace after a storm, rather than any ecstasy of love. Ah, well, I was content. I legally adopted thee as my son, and at the next monthly meeting the Friends agreed that the secret of thy parentage should be kept locked in the minds of all who knew it, so that thou mightest grow up in all things one of us."

He stopped. The story was ended. Mark was tightly clasping one hand of his foster-parent and

Faith the other. Both she and Sister Patience had tears upon their cheeks. Mark broke the silence which followed, by saying slowly, "Yea, now I understand. Many things which have been inexplicable to me have been made clear. I am glad that thou hast told me all, father, and I want thee to know that if I could love thee more than I have, in spite of my waywardness, I should do so from now on for all that thou hast done and borne for me. Perhaps forewarned is forearmed. Knowing now the source of my temptations, I may be able to meet them with a stronger front."

"I am sure that thou canst, Mark," replied Faith, bravely.

At her voice the young man started, and his face lost some of its calmness. Pain crept into his eyes.

"Oh, but can I ever be sure?" he cried. "Nothing can change my nature. Temptations will come again, and again, and again. Who knows when I shall yield to them, even more than I have in the past. My father was a man of blood—he had even *killed* his fellow men."

"Only in what amounted to warfare," protested John Gray. "Not that I condone fighting, but the shepherd must guard his sheep. He gaveth his life for them, in a sense."

"I was not thinking of that. Thou wouldst have done the same, perhaps, although I think not. It is rather that I am afraid, bitterly afraid, of myself. Thou knowest the things which I have already

done, under the spur of the hot blood which is my heritage. What might I not do if the provocation were greater still?"

It was Faith who answered him. "I am not afraid for thee, Mark. God in His wisdom giveth men their natures for some good purpose, surely. If thou hadst not had the strength and quickness which were thy father's, thou couldst not have stopped the old Prophet—as he did the pair which drew thy mother—or saved us in the fire. Thou art already learning to control thy tendencies which appear evil, and . . . and we shall help thee to fight the good fight against them, until thou hast conquered them altogether. I say 'who knows when thine heritage will stand thee in good stead and be thy salvation.'"

"Thou art verily an angel, Faith," he answered for the third time. "But I do not know: I do not know. I must think. Perhaps after I am free, to-morrow . . . Oh, I do not know."

"Yea, think, but think right with the spirit of God guiding thee. I will leave thee now, for I must hasten home. Nay, I can go alone. It is better that I should."



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### TRAGEDY

THE crimson sun had disappeared behind the rim of the western hills. Only a few exotic streaks of burnished copper and deep orange slashed the purpling blue of the sky. The valley was a great cup filling with mottled shadows to the brim. The soothing voices of eventide were rising on the air and mingling with the subdued sounds of dishes being placed upon the table within the Dexter homestead as Friend Dyer's half-grown daughters set out the simple cold viands, cooked the day before.

The man himself had stepped to the door, and was looking down the road towards the Franklyn place. He had been thinking of Faith much of the day, while apparently immersed in the Holy writ. She had looked so pale that morning in the Meeting House that he had been conscious of quite a new feeling towards her. He wanted her more than ever, but his was now not altogether a selfish desire. To be sure, she would be a great comfort and help to him in his declining years, if he could obtain her, but he would be very kind to her. Her lot had been a hard one since the death of her parents and of course she was suffering, now, but

she would get over that. First love fades as quickly as springtime's flowers, thought he. The golden-rod of Autumn is much more enduring.

The sound of a galloping horse broke in upon his pleasant reverie and he looked up with a start. Who, in Content, would be riding like that on the First Day? The light had faded almost entirely, but Dexter was able to see that the rider was not a man but a small boy. An instant later he had recognized both the horse and its rider—David Franklyn. He was clad only in undershirt and little pantaloons and was bouncing desperately on the horse's broad bare back. With a terrified premonition gripping his heart Dyer Dexter hurried down the short path to intercept him and David drew rein at the same moment. He was panting, and choking with sobs.

"David! What art thou doing like this?" demanded the man, seizing him roughly by the arm.

"Oh . . . Oh, sister Faith . . ." A terrified wail followed.

"Quick. Tell me what hath happened. Hath she been hurt?" Dexter's grasp tightened convulsively on the lad's bare arm, and he cried aloud with pain.

"She's gone!" David threw himself forward on the Prophet's neck and buried his tear-stained face in the coarse mane.

"'Gone?' Where? What dost thou mean? Answer me!"

“Oh, I don’t know ; I don’t know. The man . . . he came and took her away. Oh, Friend Dyer, canst thou not get her back? I love her so.” The boy’s terrible grief both shook and steadied Dexter. He awkwardly patted his arm in a manner such as he had never used with one of his own children, and said, more quietly, “There, there, David. It’s going to be all right. She will be found, but thou must help us. Tell me all that happened.”

David’s trembling and sobbing lessened a little and he manfully tried to control himself. Turning upon the man his wide, frightened eyes from which the big tears still flowed, unnoticed, he began, “The man came with his automobile and caught hold of her. She screamed . . .” Again he broke off with a bitter sob.

“Yea. But thou must tell me all—just what happened, if thou wouldst save thy sister. Try, boy. Speak slowly. Oh, I cannot stand this!”

“I will try. Oh, I will try, Friend Dyer. Sister Hope and I were undressing to go to bed. Faith had given us our bread and milk early and then gone for a walk. She said that she would be back before dark, and for us not to be afraid, for Jeremiah was there, and to start to get ready for bed at sundown.” All this he told consecutively although he kept catching his breath, and as he continued the sobs again punctuated his broken sentences.

“Sister Hope was in bed and I was almost ready and just looking out of the window to see if she

was coming down the road. I saw her and ho-hoed . . . and she waved to me. Then I heard the automobile come down through the yard, awful fast, and . . . and I leaned out to look at it. It was wabbling from side to side. It struck the gate post an awful bang, but the man didn't stop . . . not then he didn't stop, but . . . but he did when he got close to . . . to sister Faith."

"What man was it, David? Tell me."

"The one that had the pistol. The Mean man. I *hated* him, and so did sister Faith because he fought with her, this afternoon."

"He *fought*. Nay, but go on."

"I saw her try to run past . . . he had stopped the automobile on the grass close to the fence. But he jumped out and caught hold . . . caught hold of her . . . and . . . and she screamed . . . she screamed to *me*. And I couldn't help her, like I did this afternoon. I hollered back that I was coming . . . with my sling-shot . . ." The tears were fast coursing down his cheeks again. "But when I got out-doors she wasn't there any more. Oh!"

"And the man?"

"I don't know. I don't know. He has taken her away. The automobile was going again as fast as . . . as fast as *hell*."

The word passed unnoticed and unrebuked. Dyer Dexter was experiencing something new and terrific—life in the raw; black drama and tragedy.



He barely heard the rest; how David had called to little Hope not to cry, that it was all right, and then run in search of Jeremiah who was nowhere to be found. And how he had bridled the old Prophet and ridden for help. It was the great moment in Dexter's narrow, drab life. Emotions which he never knew the human heart could feel were tearing him: love, hate, something greater almost than either of them. Renunciation and sacrifice had held no place in his spiritual being until that instant. He drew a deep, rasping breath like a groan, and spoke in a voice strangely vibrant.

"Ride, David. Seek Mark Gray. I am old and can do nothing, not even think, now. But he can save her if any one can. O God, O God grant that he may! I will send some one for thy sister Hope," he added and called after the boy, who had already turned the horse and kicked his bare heels against his fat sides, "Tell no one else of what hath happened! Thy sister's fair name . . ." The rest was lost in the sound of the hoof-beats on the hard road.

There was the sound of supper dishes being set upon the bare table in the Gray homestead, too, and it fell gratefully on Mark's ears as he stood in the deep shadow of the porch after watching Faith out of sight down the darkening road. For the moment his conflicting emotions were at peace. The girl's declaration of courage and confidence had

driven all painful thoughts from his mind. Perhaps she was right, and on the morrow all the clouds of doubt would disappear and the sun shine out for him—for them both. At least she could now face his false accuser almost cheerfully. The God of his fathers would not permit the truth to be prevailed against. With the thought of Means came a momentary tightening of his muscles and his heart burned hotly, but he quieted himself with another thought of Faith. How lovely she had looked, how gloriously she had behaved!

“Mark, our simple supper is ready,” announced Sister Patience from within the doorway.

“And I am assuredly ready for my simple supper,” he responded, with a quick smile. The woman turned back into the darkened house with a light heart. If the youth whom she almost idolized could jest, all was well, and John Gray’s confession had been heaven-inspired.

Mark turned to follow her, but stopped, arrested by the sound of galloping hoofbeats on the macadam roadway. As Friend Dyer Dexter had started, so Mark did now; and when he, too, recognized David his heart leaped into his throat. A fearful premonition of evil took possession of him and he ran down the path, seized the old horse by the bit and swung the boy to the ground with almost one concerted motion.

“David! What is it? Faith . . . ?” he cried. The lad was still sobbing spasmodically, but he was

calmer than he had been before, and he choked out his whole tragic story almost without stopping, and paying no attention to the man's frequent interruptions. As David stumbled headlong through his account of what had occurred, and Mark's imagination pieced out his half-formed sentences and anticipated the almost unthinkable conclusion, awful wrath shook him. He ground his heel into the road, and clinched his hands until the nails dug into the flesh.

As Dyer Dexter had cried, now cried Mark, "O God! O God!"

David ended his panting recital with the words, "I stopped first at Friend Dyer's, for his home was nearer, and he was on the porch. And he bade me ride for thee, Mark. He said that thou alone couldst save her. Oh, thou canst, Mark? Say that thou canst."

"Yea, David. I will save her. God will aid me. If Dyer Dexter said that I could, I *can*. I must—though I know not how. Tell me, which way did the automobile go, David?"

"This way. Towards the village."

Mark was no longer himself. Something strange had happened within his brain. He vaguely felt that his body was cold, but it was like a thing detached, leaden, inanimate. But his brain was alive, keenly alive. And his thoughts were no longer passionately hot, but cool, coherent, incisive. Even while the boy was answering his question, he was

reasoning the matter out. "Means could not have planned it. Fate placed her in his path and he obeyed a drunken impulse—an impulse like many of mine own in the past. He was almost insane when I left him. Perhaps he will come to his senses, soon. But if he does not . . . O God, if he does not! He did not pass here—I should have seen them, for I have not left this spot. He must have swung off into the wood road which leaves the highway below Dyer Dexter's farm. Yea, he would have done that. He must have known that it rejoineth the highway beyond Smilie's Corner, for where would he be headed if not for the city . . . for home? There are no houses on that road and now it is dark. No one to see her, to hear her screams if . . . He would drive like a madman: he is a madman, now. Why did I not kill him this afternoon?"

For an instant the blood surged hotly from his heart and the red veil fell before his eyes. But only for an instant. Reason returned, and connected thought. "She would have jumped, at once, if he had not found some way to prevent her. Yea, she would have jumped even if it had cost her her life. Perhaps she fainted from fright. That was it, she fainted. And she is at his mercy. *His mercy!*"

He turned, uttering an oath, and fairly thrust David towards the house.

"Run! Tell them. Tell them that I have gone," he cried, as he sprang astride the heaving horse and dug his heels cruelly into its flanks, simultaneously



jerking the bit almost from its outraged mouth as he wheeled it about. He must reach the wood road at once, on the bare chance that he would be in time to catch them there. If he failed . . . Mark could not think beyond that point.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### IN THE NIGHT

A LUMBERING gallop was the utmost that the old Prophet could achieve, and to Mark it seemed like a snail's pace as his thoughts flew before him on black wings. The horse thundered down the deserted highway and came to the wood road.

It was scarcely more than a cart path deeply rutted in the loam, narrow, and lined with intruding boughs and bushes. There blackness reigned complete, and subconsciously the man's terrors on Faith's account were multiplied. Only by looking upwards, and watching the slightly paler heaven between the hedging tree-tops could he guide the horse at all, and in time he found it best to leave the road-finding to its instinct, and content himself with urging it forward with word and blow. Mark had ridden but little, yet he felt no fear and no unnaturalness. Once the fact struck him as odd that he was able to stick on the unsaddled mount, twisting and turning in the dark, with such ease. Then he thanked God that he had been given the instincts of the plainsman who had fathered him.

On they went, madly. Bushes tore at his legs with thorny fingers, low branches whipped them-

selves across his face, and he paid no heed to them. Once the Prophet stumbled and nearly flung him, but he succeeded in clinging on, gripping hard with his powerful knees. Every thud of the hoofs in the soft ground was like a blow upon his anguished brain, for it measured the nearer and nearer approach to the highway, with her whom he sought still unfound.

Then the road abruptly ended. The hoof-beats rang sharply out on the hard macadam. There was the faintest of after-glows in the western sky and it enabled Mark to see vaguely down the straight highway for a fair distance. No moving object was in sight. He had failed.

He checked the horse, whose heavy breathing and heaving sides told how greatly the unaccustomed pace had wearied it. Further pursuit was out of the question. Even if Means had driven that way, there was no hope now of his overtaking him; not even a glimmer of fool's hope. Yea, he had failed and his heart seemed dead. Then by the roadside, a few hundred yards ahead of him, appeared a white gleam as an invisible hand turned a pocket flashlight upon something which dimly reflected it—the polished side of a motor car.

With a loud cry, Mark dug his heels into the horse's flanks. His heart had leaped again, and was pounding furiously. The Prophet responded, but with a marked limp. As they drew nearer, the owner of the light turned it inadvertently so that

it fell, for an instant, upon his own person, and Mark knew that the man was not Means.

Nevertheless he leaped from his mount as he reached the motionless car, the engine hood of which was up, and laid his hand heavily upon the stranger's arm. The man had already turned in surprise, and now he showed resentment, but it was lost on Mark, who cried, "Friend, hast thou seen a big touring car pass this way within the last quarter hour—or perhaps a half?" He spoke with such excitement that his words ran together and were scarcely comprehensible.

"What's that?" Bewilderment and irritation sharpened the question. Mark repeated his demand.

"*Did* I see one. The darned fool that was driving it went by so close that he pretty nearly took my mud-guard off, and sent me into this confounded ditch. A fellow who'll drive at close to sixty, in the night and without headlights, is courting sudden death—and deserves it. I suppose he was full of moonshine, and they say that the Lord takes care of drunkards. What do you want him for? Constable?"

"Nay. But I must overtake him; I *must*. Oh, God help me to overtake him."

"You've got a fine chance of doing it unless God *does* help," answered the man, with sarcasm tinging his voice. "Think He's likely to turn that nag into a Pegasus?"

"Thy jest is ill-timed, for this matter is no jest



to me," said Mark, sternly. "Moreover, He hath already aided me. He hath placed *thee* here, and thou shalt take me to the city."

"Indeed! Well, I like your nerve, my Quaker friend. Here! What the devil do you think you're doing?" The demand was occasioned by the fact that Mark's hand had seized upon his wrist and turned it sharply over, nor did he relinquish his vise-like grasp even when the other uttered a sharp cry and an oath.

"I am convincing thee that thou wilt aid me, for I have great need of thy help." The young man's voice sounded so deadly in earnest that the car owner looked up with a new expression.

"Let go." Mark complied with his order, and the man began to rub his wrist gingerly. "Lord, I thought you were going to break it. You're certainly as strong as a bull, and unless you're crazy there must be something pretty serious on your mind."

"Judge for thyself." Hastily, in brief, disjointed sentences, the Quaker gave him a sketchy outline of what had occurred. The listener broke in at frequent intervals with exclamations of incredulity and growing anger, and finally he interrupted him altogether, with the words, "Man, you must be mad. Why, good Lord, a thing like this simply couldn't happen nowadays, except in the wildest melodrama or the movies. Couldn't the boy have been mistaken?"

"Nay. I tell thee that it is true: Thou art right that it couldn't happen, but it has happened. It's like an awful nightmare, but I'm awake. Faith! My God, my God." Giving way for the first time, Mark threw himself against the side of the car and buried his face on his out-flung arms, while his form shook convulsively. The other man laid his hand upon the youth's shoulder, and spoke in a subdued, passionate voice. "Son, count on me. I'm with you till you find that unspeakable scoundrel—or would be if my motor had not gone dead. What are you going to do? Is there any house near, from which we can telephone for . . . ?"

At the word "motor," Mark raised his head, and now he broke in with, "Nay, but I am a mechanic—the only one within ten miles. What seemeth to be the trouble? Here, hold the light for me." His gaze and his fingers fairly flew over the intricate mechanism of the twin six cylinders, and in less than a moment he had exclaimed, "Ah! I have it! At least I think . . ."

The driver was already in his seat with hand on the ignition switch and foot on the starter. There was a whirl and then the loud hum of the unthrottled racing engine. "She goes! Don't let anybody try to tell me that there has not been an omnipotent power helping us to-night. Quick. Get in!"

Mark did not need the command. He had already slammed down the hood, bolted it and sprung into the other seat.

"What about your horse?" queried the other, raising his voice over the roar of the motors.

"Let him go. He'll find his way home." The machine leaped forward and the roar became a steady, vibrant hum. Before settling himself down to endure in stoical silence, the tortured youth asked, "Didst thou see Faith . . . the girl, in the machine?"

"Lord, no. I saw nobody. It went past me as if my car were standing still. But the top was up and the side curtains closed, come to think of it. Let's see, it couldn't have been more than twenty minutes before you arrived. Like enough he stopped on that side road to fix them."

Mark drew a painfully sharp breath, and beat his hands together twice before clasping them hard in a physical effort to control himself.

They spoke scarcely at all while the minutes passed, and the miles sped steadily backwards. The needle of the speedometer quivered about the figure fifty. The big headlights bored a tunnel in the darkness and seemed to lay a smooth, white road before their spinning wheels. The wind sung a high note, sustained without a break. There was something almost hypnotic about it all, and Mark's nerves began to relax a little, even though he sat in one position, straining forward as if by so doing he could increase their pace. He had never ridden in the night, before, and if conditions had been otherwise the sensation would have delighted him.

But now he was barely conscious of his surroundings or the machine, and his brain alternated between thoughts of Faith's desperate situation, wherever she might be, and a peculiar feeling that the whole thing was, indeed, merely a nightmare and that he must wake up, soon, and find it so.

The thought of the girl brought a double anguish, for he knew that, although the probabilities were that Means would instinctively make for the city, he might have turned off on any one of the numerous intersecting roads—in which case their's was the wildest of goose chases.

Once the driver slowed down almost to a stop, in order to procure and light a cigar. "It steadies my nerves, and I'm going to need 'em all when we reach the suburbs and the city itself," he explained, with a grim look. Mark nodded, although even the moment's delay made him rave, inwardly.

So an hour passed. The country side gave place to villages; the villages to suburban towns; the city limits were reached and passed with scarcely any diminution in their speed. It was Sunday night and the traffic in the streets fortunately light, but many a pedestrian turned to scowl after them, having barely escaped the flying car. At length they reached a busier thoroughfare and were, perforce, obliged to drive more moderately, although the owner kept one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the horn.



"Whew!" he ejaculated. "Some driving, if I did do it. I hope to heaven that I may never have to duplicate it for fifty miles."

"Amen," Mark responded.

"What are we going to do, now. You say that fellow's name is Robert Means. We can probably find his home address in the directory at any drugstore, but I suppose that the best thing for us to do is to call on the police."

"Nay!" The idea filled Mark with horror. Police interference meant newspaper publicity. He had glanced over sensational articles of that nature in papers left at the smithy by motorists, and Faith Franklyn must not be made the center of one.

"But, Good Lord, man, we can't go alone and break into the fellow's house! Especially on what is merely suspicion—no matter how strong. I'll go a long way with you in seeing this thing through, but that's too far. We'd be arrested."

"I do not ask thine aid further, Friend. I do not care what happens to me. Let us find the address, as thou hast suggested, and if thou wilt then drive me to the place I shall be content, and everlastingly thy debtor."

"But you probably couldn't get inside—particularly if this fellow Means lives in apartments. He certainly wouldn't open the door for you. If you only knew some friend of his. . . ."

"That's it! Thou hast struck it. I do know one

—the man who suggested that he come to Content.”

“Great. Who is it?”

“A Mr. Durham. He is a professional wrestler and men call him ‘the Bull.’ Dost thou know him?”

“I’ve heard of him. Rather. Do you know where he lives?”

“Yea. He told me that if I was ever in the city I might find him at the Central A. A. Little either of us thought that I should ever seek him for such a purpose.”

“The Central Athletic Association? That’s on this very street and we’re almost there. . . . Yes, that’s it just ahead on the left.”

The machine drew up by the curb within the radius of a powerful arc-light. At the same moment the door of the building opened and two men stepped forth, one of unusual bulk, the other slender and dapper. Both paused on the steps to light, the one a big cigar, the other a cigarette.

The Bull glanced up and looked directly into Mark’s tense face. In his astonishment he dropped the cigar entirely, and stood with mouth open. Then he sprang forward, exclaiming, “The fightin’ Quaker! Well, fer the love uv Mike. What in hell are *you* doin’ here?”

It seemed to Mark at that instant that the Lord had indeed heard and responded to the prayer for help which his heart had been repeating like a litany all through the long, mad ride. That the Bull himself should have appeared so opportunely—he

was obviously just departing from the club—in answer to his petition did not strike him as strange, but rather as natural. God moves in mysterious ways, and uses all sorts and conditions of men as His earthly angels to perform His will.

The Quaker paused for no introductions or preliminary explanations, but plunged headlong into the story of Faith's abduction. He hurried through its salient parts with a headlong rush of words, paying no attention to the wrestler's repeated interruptions and oaths. The latter stood beside the car, leaning forwards tensely. His huge hands gripped the edge of the door and his ugly face worked ferociously as he listened. When Mark had panted out his conclusion, the Bull broke forth into a string of violent profanity and pounded his fists down with such force that the machine trembled.

"God A'mighty, Flash! Did ya hear? Oh, the low-lived, drunken cur; and me callin' him 'friend,' and sendin' him out there as a sorter joke. Joke! Oh, *hell!*" Tears of rage and grief came to his eyes, and he dashed them away like a child. "If I catch him . . . if I catch him I'll *kill* him, fer this. So help me, I'll break him in half. I'll . . ."

"Get in—both of you," commanded the car owner, tersely. "We've wasted too much time, already. And we've got to get the police."

"Police be damned!" the wrestler exploded, as he jerked open the rear door and sent Flash into

the tonneau with a mighty shove. "We'll have no bulls on this job . . . leastwise, not yet we won't. If he's there I'll handle him. D'yuh know where 1438 M—— Street is?"

"Yes. I can find it."

"Drive there, then. And knock hell outer anything that gits in your way—don't stop fer nothin'. 1438 M—— Street! That's where Mr. Robert V. Means, Esquire, has the joint that he calls his 'Bachelor quarters.' " Heavy sarcasm made his voice shake. "I'll bachelor 'em, for him. Oh, me and you know the place, don't we, Flash?"

The gambler nodded and his ferret eyes gleamed. Excitement was the breath of his life, and now his one-time hostility towards Mark was forgotten in his new-born hatred of the man upon whom he had formerly fawned. The Bull's wrath was in the main responsible for this, for his own code of morals might have countenanced Means' act. He responded with, "I'll say we do, the . . ."

"You bet we know it! Plenty of wild parties we've had there, but never again. He won't be holdin' no more celebrations in *this* burg, I'm tellin' yuh."

Nothing could check the wrestler's excited loquacity. He could not stop talking, to save him, and leaned forward in the rear seat rolling his sentences out like breakers in a storm, while the machine sped up the streets and around sharp corners almost without slacking speed. Mark ceased



to pay any attention to what he was shouting in his ear, until one sentence caught his attention and brought him up with every nerve tingling and blood pounding through his veins.

"Bob Means used tuh use dope, too, didn't he, Flash?"

"Dope is right. Didn't you never see his forearm?"

"Well, I thought so. Booze alone never gave him them shakes which he sometimes had. The two things don't go together as a rule, but when they do . . . good-night! 'Course he was crazy: he couldn't have done a thing like this if he hadn't 'a been—I'll give him that much credit. But the worst is it's a hundred tuh one that he gave *her* a jab uv the dream stuff tuh keep her quiet. If she fainted off when he grabbed her he could 'a done it, easy."

"Yea," answered Flash. "A fifth of a grain would have kept her quiet enough after it took hold—she not being used to it. And like enough he tied her up and put her in the back seat with the curtains down before she came to."

"Sure. The old game—only it aint s'posed tuh be played in polite sassiety. Then, if anybody seen him gittin' her out of the car and started to git personal, she was his sick sister. *I* know. The low-down crook!"

Mark was filled with unspeakable horror which could have been no greater had he known the truth

—how nearly right these men of the sporting world were in their surmises. The business blocks with their occasional lighted windows were succeeded by rows of brick apartment houses more fully illuminated, but they made only a vague moving background for his mental picture of Faith, bound and drugged, helpless, and in the complete power of a drug-maddened man. It was unthinkable, yet that did not prevent him from thinking of it until his brain reeled. He passed his hand across his aching eyes. Nay, it couldn't be real. He, Mark Gray, a Quaker from the peaceful village of Content, in the clutch of such adventure, and Faith Franklyn in such fell circumstances! He *must* wake up, soon.

The Bull called out, excitedly. The man beside him put on the brakes and the car came to a grinding halt.

Mark had closed his eyes for a moment, they ached so. Now he opened them, and saw that they had stopped against the curbing of a quiet, tree-lined street. A row of connecting red brick houses, all alike and all four stories high, made an unbroken wall along it, save for occasional black apertures which marked narrow alleys. One was right in front of them. For the most part the windows were darkened, for, although it was not yet eleven o'clock, it was Sunday night; but here and there squares of light appeared, seen through lace curtains, and through at least three of them,

wide-open, came the sounds of piano-players in conflicting jazz selections. He did not know what they were, nor give them conscious thought, but the sounds jarred horribly upon his nerves. How dared people be so gay, on the First Day night, and when tragedy stalked close by?

All these things Mark took in at a glance. Then he leaned suddenly forward, every sinew tense, teeth grating, heart bursting. Directly before him, in the full glare of their headlights, stood Means' automobile, top up and curtains drawn. He heard his companion exclaim, excitedly, "That's it. That's the very car that passed me," and the Bull answered, "Yep, it's his, damn him. Come on!"

The other three went out of the machine first. Mark was surprised at his own slowness, but his limbs seemed to have turned to lead. Waves of alternating heat and cold were passing through his body; his throat was dry, his tongue seemed to be swollen; his hands worked mechanically. He could not think beyond that moment. The nearness of the crisis, which he had been so long imagining, paralyzed him for the instant. To act, is one thing; to know that in sixty seconds, perhaps, you have got to act, is another.

But all that he had to do was to follow, for the wrestler was mounting the flight of sandstone steps to the front door, three at a time. The others, Mark with them, were at his heels. The glass door was flung open, admitting them to a

small, square vestibule. They were faced by still another door, forbiddingly closed, and it did not yield to the Bull's mighty shaking of the handle. He turned about, and Mark saw that his scowling glance was directed along a row of glass-faced boxes, with small buttons below them, which lined the side wall.

"Yep. There you are, Mr. Robert Vandervetter Means!" he exploded, setting his huge thumb on one of the buttons. "I remember now. Third floor, rear. That's him."

They waited. There was no sound other than that of their own audible breathing. Then the Bull swore, alike at himself and Means. He ended by growling, "I was a fool tuh ring that one, anyway. What was bitin' me? He'd be jest delighted to open the door. Like hell he would! Here, help me push all the buttons in sight." They obeyed and the faint sound of electric bells ringing in the down-stairs apartments greeted their ears. But another full minute passed and the door remained forbiddingly closed.

Now the enforced delay was driving Mark wild. Every second seemed an hour, and immeasurably precious. There was an added ringing within his own head, and his impatience burst its bounds. His soul was praying with terrible intensity, but his lips began to repeat each word of the wrestler's steady swearing, for the latter was damning the



sleepers within the house with all the force of his profane vocabulary.

Suddenly he could bear inaction no longer. He had no plan, but he turned from the doorway, sprang down the steps and then plunged into the dark alleyway beside the building, utterly regardless of possible obstacles. A dozen strides carried him into a square, high-walled area in the rear of the block, a place dimly illuminated by the light from a few windows above him.

"The third floor, rear." The Bull's words beat upon his brain. .

He looked up. The shapes of two windows with drawn shades were dimly visible, two stories above his head, and even as he stared at them, wondering, a shadowed profile appeared for an instant on one of the curtains. It was gone, as quickly, but he had seen enough.

The silhouette, seen in one brief glance, was that of the man he sought.

The sight was like a spark to the dynamo of impulse, Mark waited for nothing. He could vaguely make out the form of an iron fire-escape which zig-zagged down the wall, to end in a narrow skeleton platform on a level with the second floor. The steps to cover the remaining distance were elevated, balanced out of reach from the ground. But Mark had no need of them. A quick run, an upward leap, and his hands closed upon the iron

bar above him, as it had many a time upon horizontal limbs. An instant later he was over the railing and mounting the steps, which rang metallically beneath his feet. Then he was outside the window, behind which was Means. And Faith?

## CHAPTER XXX

### JUDGMENT

“Is every darned soul in this joint *dead*—and buried?”

The wrestler was ready to explode, and batter the door in, before they heard the clicking of the latch, electrically released by some tenant aroused from slumber and tired of the continued ringing. Mark's departure had passed unnoticed by the others, in their excitement, and now the three ran into the hallway and stormed up the two flights of winding stairs, Durham in the lead. An automatic elevator had stood invitingly waiting but he would have none of it—if he saw it at all, indeed. On reaching the third floor the Bull paused uncertainly, for they were faced with three doors all exactly alike, and unmarked. Flash and the driver of the automobile were pressing him close, asking questions and making suggestions, and he turned on them with a savage oath.

It was almost lost in the sound which that same instant came from behind the door on their right—a crashing and shivering of glass, and a muffled cry in a woman's voice.

For a second there was silence. Then the Bull

cried, "Say. Whe . . . where's Mark?" The other two looked at one another in surprise and consternation, but they did not answer, and the wrestler turned again to give the door handle a terrific shaking without result. Then he stepped back a pace and they saw his mighty shoulders lift until his neck entirely disappeared, and his bulging arms lock across his breast.

"Git outer my way!"

With a loud "Uh!" the Bull charged. One shoulder struck the top panel of the door and crashed straight through it. He drew back for a second lunge, but—with the quickness of a cat—Flash jumped in front of him and thrust his slender arm through the breach. His seeking fingers found the door-knob on the inside, and turned it. The door flew open, and the three men jumped into the room. It was in darkness, but the bedroom beyond was brightly lighted. Framed in the doorway thereto they beheld a startling picture.

On one side, seated in a posture of weakness in a big arm-chair, and loosely wrapped in a motor rug, was the girl—Faith Franklyn. Her countenance was deathly pale, even to the parted lips; loose strands of her hair swept across her forehead, and a thick coil of it rested on the nape of her neck; her eyes were very large and dark, and their unevenly distended pupils held an unnatural look. Dazed terror was written upon her face, but she was not looking towards them.



Opposite her, with his back to them, was Means. They could not see his face, and there was no need, for his very attitude showed mortal fear.

In the center of the picture stood Mark Gray, his feet amid the strewn glass from the broken window-pane. He, too, was motionless, leaning back against the sill, but with his head and shoulders thrust forward as though he were about to spring. His arms were partly bent, with fingers tense and curved like huge talons. Blood dripped steadily from a deep gash across the knuckles of his right hand, and was flowing from a cut on his cheek. It added to the expression of terrible intent upon his drawn countenance.

There was a bare instant during which no one moved a muscle, and, to the stranger, the effect was like a gruesomely vivid painting depicting the most primal of human passions. And two of the motionless figures therein were Quakers!

Then Mark's jaw moved, with an audible grating noise. It was a little thing, but sufficient. Means cried out in craven fear, wheeled, and sprang for the doorway. His face was ashen and working horribly. He could not have heard the commotion in the other room, for when he caught sight of the Bull's massive, menacing form blocking his escape his jaw dropped, and he stopped, whispering, "Oh, my God!"

The cornered rat! Lips drawn back from his teeth, he suddenly turned again and sprang at Mark.

The Quaker met his terror-bred attack by stepping forward and crouching. His left shoulder caught his antagonist in the pit of the stomach; simultaneously he seized one of his wrists with his right hand and thrust his left arm between his legs. He straightened up, and flung Means over his head, to fall with a thud and lie, quivering, upon the floor.

"By the gods, Bull, did you see it? Did you see it?" shrilled Flash, his voice almost out of control through excitement. "You taught him that trick."

The gambler's eyes were gleaming with the fierce light of a wolf in at the kill, and he would have dodged under the wrestler's outstretched arm if the other had not flung him back.

"Keep out uv this, Flash," growled Durham. "The boy don't need no help from you. Let him finish the job."

Mark had swung about and was standing astride the fallen man. There was another frozen instant, ended by the sound of a deep sigh from Faith. Her head had dropped forward and she fell in a swoon over the arm of the chair. Mark forgot everything else, and sprang to gather her in his arms. The three watchers also hurried forward to help, and the owner of the car, which had brought them there—in time—quietly took command of the situation and directed that the girl be laid flat upon the bed. "I'm married," he said, "and seeing a

woman faint is nothing new for me. One of you see if you can get some water."

Flash departed on a run for the kitchenette, while Mark knelt by the bedside and began to chafe Faith's icy hands, with hands which were nearly as cold. He tried to speak, to ask if she were dead, but all the sound which came was a gasp like a dry sob.

There was a slight noise from the other side of the room, and the Bull, who had been standing in speechless distress beside Mark, turned in time to catch sight of Means clinging to the window sill and on the point of swinging one leg over it.

"No yuh don't, you," the wrestler bellowed, leaping across the floor and seizing the other by his wrist. He twisted the arm sharply back and up between his shoulder blades, and Means shrieked aloud in agony. "Yuh don't go sneakin' away from what's comin' to yuh, Mr. Robert Means. Not much yuh don't."

His victim gave another anguished cry. The torture caused the sweat to start from his every pore, and he gasped out, "Don't! For God's sake, Bull, you're breaking my arm."

"I'd be breakin' your worthless neck, if I wasn't savin' it fer him tuh twist," grunted the wrestler, pointing to Mark.

The friendly stranger had loosened Faith's simple dress and liberally sprinkled her face with the water which Flash had brought. She drew a choking breath, slowly opened her eyes with a more natural

light in them, and looked up into Mark's anxious face. The faintest suggestion of a smile touched her lips, and they whispered his name.

"Faith. Faith, my dear one! Thou art all right now?" he begged.

"Yea, I . . . I feel strange and weak, but I am all right except . . . except a little dizzy. If I might have a drink of cold water. . . ."

Supported by his arm, she sat up and leaned against his shoulder, resting her head back upon it. Flash was already on his way back to the kitchenette. Faith had closed her eyes for an instant. Now she reopened them and looked uncertainly about the room. An expression of terror crept into her face, followed by a hot flush of outraged modesty as she glanced down at herself and became conscious of her disarray in the presence of men, and strangers.

"Oh, Mark," she whispered, and turned to bury her face against his breast.

"There, there, my dear one. It is over, now. Thou art safe: what else matters." He comforted her as one would a child.

"But it is true—all true, then?" Faith's tearful voice came in muffled tones. She had broken down at last and was trembling, and clinging fast to him. "I had begun to believe that it was all an awful dream, and it is still hazy—I can't be sure of it. What happened? I remember that he . . . caught hold of me, and threw me in his automobile.



Yea, that was it. He started to drive away . . . he was carrying me away from my home. I tried to jump, but he held my wrist." Mark looked down and saw that there was a blue discoloration upon it, but, before he could speak his wrathful thoughts, she sobbed on, "Then . . . I forget. Did I faint? Yea, that must have been it. When I remember again it was almost dark and I couldn't move . . . I think that I was all wrapped up in something, and . . . my arm hurt. I tried to get up . . . to throw myself out . . . but I couldn't and . . . and then. . . Why, I scarcely remember. I knew where I was . . . that the machine was speeding terribly . . . but . . . I hardly seemed to care. I can't explain it, Mark. What was the matter with me?"

"Thou wert dazed—with fright. That is all, Faith," he responded, telling the lie bravely. She must never know the truth.

She sighed, and moved in his arms. "At last we stopped. The man took me out in his arms, and brought me here. Then . . . then thou camest, Mark. Oh, how couldst thou have known? Verily God must have sent thee to me. Where . . . where are we? And these other men? Who . . . ?"

"Never mind, now, dear heart. Do not try to talk or understand further, for the present. It is enough that the bad dream is ended, and soon thou wilt be back in thine own home in Content."

His words, meant to be comforting, started a new idea in her shaken mind, and she started.

“‘Content’? Nay, how can I return there, after this? How could I, Mark?”

“Of course thou canst! Why, thou hast done no wrong. Thy neighbors will but love thee the more, even as I do—though I should have said that was impossible. But it matters not. If thou wishest, we two can go away, taking David and little Hope, and be together always.”

Faith's arms drew close about his neck and he pressed his lips into the hollow of her's.

“There is another room,” she whispered, so softly that he could barely hear her. “Please take me into it. I am strong again, and must arrange my . . . mine apparel and hair.”

Mark lifted her from the bed, and carried her into the living-room, preceded by the ubiquitous Flash whose ready hand switched on the electric lights.

“Now leave me, please,” she said. “I shall be ready in a moment.”

The two men went back, and Mark closed the door behind him.

As he entered the bedroom again, the Bull turned towards him with an ugly grin.

“Here's a present for you, Mark, an' I wish yuh joy with it,” he announced, spinning Means about and shoving him so violently that he would have pitched headlong to the floor, if Mark had not sprung forward and caught him by both shoulders.

The man slumped in his grasp, his knees doubling under him. The Quaker held him up, at arms length, and regarded him with a look which was fixed and inscrutable, but the very iciness of it was more menacing than a blazing passion would have been.

Means had listened to the woman's incoherent story. He knew that the man who held him helpless in a grip like iron was thinking of it, and her. A faint shudder ran through his whole frame and he tore his eyes from Mark's and looked wildly about the room. Would the other three men allow him to be killed, in cold blood? Each face wore a different expression, but sympathy was not in any of them.

The silence! He could not stand it any longer. Means writhed madly in that vise-like grasp, and cried aloud. "My God! Don't look at me like that, Gray. I was mad, crazy, I tell you. Drink and drug crazy. Why, you know that yourself. Tell me you do?"

"Yea, thou wert mad—but men kill mad dogs." Mark's speech was as cool, as impersonal as a judge's, and his words were like a judgment. They fitted in with Means' terror-laden thoughts, and tore down the final barrier to his control. He groveled before his captor, uttering almost incoherent cries for mercy. "No, not that! Not that! You . . . you couldn't kill me, Gray. Why, you're a *Quaker*. You couldn't kill me," he whined, through chatter-

ing teeth. "I . . . I . . . I didn't injure her. I didn't mean to. God, man, don't look at me like that. Don't. Don't! I swear it. The air brought me back to my senses. Do you hear? To my senses. I was going to send her home . . . in the morning. I couldn't to-night. Why, how could I? I didn't injure her. God is my witness that I did not." Over and over again he said it.

"I know that thou didst not, but thou art late in calling on the Lord."

The expression of strained intentness deepened upon the faces of the onlookers. This calm baiting by the Quaker was not what they had looked for, and it was becoming somewhat unbearable, even to them. The stranger took a step forward, ready to interpose if Mark started to carry out the threat contained in his first sentence. The same thought was now in the mind of the wrestler, as well. A moment before he would have rejoiced to see Mark beat the abductor almost to a pulp, but killing, impersonally, was murder.

Still Mark stood in the same position. He was outwardly like a thing of stone, but his thoughts were in a turmoil and they would not coördinate.

"He says he didn't hurt her," began the Bull, uneasily. "Yuh can't do fer a guy in cold blood, but I'll stand for your beatin' him up . . . some. He's got that comin' to him, before yuh turn him over to the cops."



Mark abruptly dropped his arms and turned with a gesture of decision. "I shall do neither," he announced.

"What's that? You're goin' to let him go, scott free?" demanded Durham in amazement, and he stepped forward with fist raised as though himself to punish Means.

"Yea. But not yet. First I shall give him the chance to clear his conscience of at least one of his sins which resteth upon it, and see to it that he taketh that chance. Stay there, while I think for a moment." Simultaneously with the order he thrust Means into the chair which had held Faith. Flash sprang beside him there, showing his yellow teeth like a wolf-dog on guard.

"What is the hour, friend?" Mark abruptly demanded of his new companion.

The man consulted his watch, and answered. "Quarter past eleven."

"I fear that I have kept thee long away from thy family, and that they will be worried over thine absence," remarked the Quaker, with an apologetic little smile. "And I know not how to thank thee for thine aid. To-night thou hast verily been God's agent, perhaps in saving three lives, for had I not arrived when I did . . . Nay, that is not to be thought of, now. I cannot reward thee, but assuredly He will, in some manner."

"Forget it, old man," responded the other, suddenly embarrassed. "The thought that I was able

to help is enough for me. Thank God that I happened to be where I was. That's all I say."

"Amen to that." Mark held out his hand and gripped the other's hard. "I thank you, also, friends Durham and Flash. You too were sent by heaven." Mark turned and stretched out a hand to each.

"Hell, we ain't done nothin'," responded the Bull, blinking a little. "The thing I want tuh know is what you're goin' tuh do with this . . ." To cover his confusion he turned and kicked the leg of the chair in which Means was slumped.

"Wait. I have something to tell thee that thou hast not yet heard about," answered the other, and he evenly recounted the story of the criminal charge which was hanging over his head, and what had preceded it, while the Bull's anger rekindled and his huge hands worked. Before Mark had finished speaking, however, Faith had reappeared in the doorway, her hair and dress neatly arranged. Her presence put a check on the listeners' tongues.

"For his own soul's sake, as well as for my honor's, the man must return with me to the county court, to-morrow. He hath sinned and he must confess that sin. Then he will be free to depart, and I warn him that he will be wise to do so, and that quickly." For a moment Mark's voice lost its evenness and rang out like steel.

"Second that motion," exploded the Bull, turning to glare at Means. "But say, how was yuh planning tuh get him there?"

"As he came. He shall drive himself and us back in his motor car, starting as soon as we have rested a little, and perhaps partaken of a little food."

"I won't: I won't go back. Wild horses couldn't drag me," cried Means, springing up. There was the vision of a lynching rope in his mind's eye.

"Maybe wild horses couldn't, but I can." The Bull's thundering voice, and his leap at Means brought a cry of terror from both Faith and the man. Durham seized his wrist in a savage grip again, and sent him back into the seat. "I can and will, for I'm goin' along on the front seat with yuh, tuh see that yuh come through, *clean*, an' act pretty doin' it. Get me?"

"Count me in on that," grinned Flash, envisioning a new sensation.

"I'll count you out. There's just room fer me and him in front, and your company ain't goin' tuh be needed in the rear seat, I'm tellin' yuh. Friend Mark don't require no help. No, sir. You may be my manager, but I'm managin' *this* bout, and what I ses, goes."

The girl flushed, but she gave the wrestler a look of gratitude, as she stepped hesitatingly forward to thank them all with a voice which was low and sweet, with the sound of tears in it. And when her firm, small hand was lost in the Bull's diffident clasp there sprang up between them, full grown, as strange a friendship as ever was formed, but one which would certainly last through life.

Then the stranger took his leave, to return home with a story which his wife could never entirely believe, which was not at all strange. He scarcely could, himself, on the morrow.

"Now," remarked the wrestler, "I'm runnin' things fer the time bein'. Is there a telephone anywhere in that jumpin' off place you folks call home?"

"Yea, one," Mark responded. "In the store of Friend Dyer Dexter—thou knowest him."

"I'll say I do." The Bull grinned. "It ain't likely that he's there, at close to midnight on Sunday, but while you three are out I'll take a chance that I can get the good news over the wire, so that your folks can quit worryin' their heads off—the which they're doin' jest about now."

"Oh, if thou couldst, Mr. Durham," exclaimed Faith, clasping her hands. Her cheeks were wet with tears again as she thought of Hope and David. Mark added the surprised interrogation, "While we're out?"

"Sure. That's what I said. I'm figgerin' on playing jailer fer . . . fer *this*, fer the next hour or two. But you're goin' to eat, an' eat hearty. That's the job of Flash, here—tuh see that yuh do. Flash, you take 'em to the Palace Oyster House. It's near, open day and night, and they claims tuh have the best fried oysters in Philly. Make each of 'em eat a bushel, if yuh have tuh use force. Blow. Git out, and don't come back until they're fed up.



We ain't a-goin' tuh start fer the country until most daylight, anyway, so's tuh git there jest in time fer the final act. I dote on sensations—as the old maid said."

A half hour later the many mirrors in the famous old Oyster House reflected, and the gilt-framed pictures looked down upon, the strangest group of midnight diners which had ever sat at one of the round, polished tables—Flash, the gambler, and the Quaker youth and maiden. Another half hour later the three arose and passed out into the calm night. As they mounted the steps to the street Flash said, with a queer note of apology in his voice, "Er . . . by the way Miss . . . Miss Franklyn . . . I . . . I guess the Bull sort of forgot what kind of pictures there was on the walls at the palace. Anyhow, I did . . . and . . . well . . ."

"Please. Do not apologize, Friend Flash. I . . . I had an eye single to the oysters and . . . and they were very good, although I had never eaten any, before." And Faith had made another lasting friend.

At length the Bull yielded to Mark's importunings that they start for home, and his insistence that they had rested long enough. He and Faith had been sitting for two hours in the living-room of Means' apartment, the victims of a sudden, strange reserve which had kept them almost silent, although

heart spoke to heart through the physical contact of their clasped hands.

The car was standing waiting for them, and, after they had parted from Flash, the Bull, with a final word of warning, placed Means at the wheel with his own powerful hand gripping his right wrist, and Mark lifted Faith in the back seat and drew her within the circle of his protecting arm. They moved off down the deserted street.

Through the windows in the side curtains Faith could see the calm stars over the tall, darkened buildings, shining peacefully, far removed from the petty loves and hatreds of the little world. The sight of them bred a new peace within her own troubled heart. There God dwelt, but not there alone. He had been very close to her that night, making even her His humble servant in bringing about Mark's vindication and his greatest conquest over self.

They left the city behind. The shadowed fields appeared on either side of the straight road. For the while no longer a Quaker girl, consciously holding her natural impulses in check lest they lead to evil or the appearance of it, but just a woman, weary of body, nervously pulled down by what she had endured, Faith turned and snuggled closer to the man—her chosen mate. He folded both arms about her, and laid his head gently on her smooth, thick hair, whispering such words as a man would speak to a maid in such a case.

So they rode back through the night, while the stars paled and the shadows lifted to reveal a new dawn.

And thus the writer of romantic fiction would leave them, for the reader's imagination could be relied upon to supply the ending. But the conscientious chronicler of events has no right to omit the last chapter, in which the snarled skein is finally all untangled so that the Fates may begin anew their weaving. Besides, it would be cheating the Bull of the dramatic climax which he had planned for the romance of his two friends.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE LAST CHAPTER

(WHICH THE READER IS AT LIBERTY TO OMIT)

IT verily seemed that almost every grown person dwelling in Content, who could by any possibility get away from his or her duties, and whose legs were strong enough to carry him or her five miles, or who owned a horse-drawn conveyance or could find place in one, had crowded into the little court room at the County seat, well before nine o'clock that morning. The surprise shown by some that certain other ones were there, and the explanations and reasons given by neighbor to neighbor for his presence at the trial of Mark Gray for assault with a dangerous weapon—the charge of attempt to murder had been dropped—indicated that human nature and Quaker nature are, after all, one and the same thing under the skin.

There were certain notable absentees from the gathering, however—the accused and his accuser; John Gray and Sister Patience; Friends Dyer Dexter and Daniel Goodbody—and especially Sister Faith Franklyn. The girl's absence provoked no little comment, and the eager waiters were about equally divided. Part maintained that she would



show good sense and commendable self restraint by staying away, and part insisting that it was her Christian duty to be present, and that it would be positively inhuman to her to fail to give Mark the sustaining comfort of her presence.

Perhaps she would yet arrive, perhaps she would not—but where were the others? Strange that they were not there. The hour for the trial had already arrived; the minute hand on the big wall time piece was well started on its circuitous journey towards ten o'clock. They would have thought it more astonishing, still, if they had known that half of the missing ones were actually within a few feet of them, just on the inner side of the door marked "PRIVATE," near the Judge's bench, and that the principals in the case were in company some miles distant, at that moment repairing a blown-out tire. More than an hour before, the presiding Justice had placed his retiring room at the disposal of the constable from Content, who had arrived with a strange story and a scarcely less strange company—John Gray, Sister Patience, Friend Dyer Dexter, David and Hope Franklyn . . . and Jeremiah Jones.

As in most small places, gossip ordinarily spread like wildfire in the village of Content. But a fire has to be given a start, either by accident or intent, and the story of Faith's tragic disappearance had been locked within the hearts of the few men,

women, and children who were now gathered together, anxiously waiting in the anteroom.

Dyer Dexter had seen to that. The tragedy which touched him so nearly had rudely torn away his pettiness and he stood forth revealed a Man. He had taken charge of the situation, unopposed, for when John Gray had heard David's sobbing repetition of his story, he had been too shaken to do ought but pray. It was Dexter who sent one of his half-grown daughters for the almost frantic little Hope, and laid upon all of his household a command of the strictest silence—to disobey which was unthinkable. It was he who had sought and found the missing Jeremiah communing with a whiskey bottle in his barn loft, and almost frightened the last of his little wit out of him with his thundering denunciations and the charge that he, alone, was to blame for what had happened. Jeremiah would never drink again. It was he who had brought the constable from his home and taken him to the Grays' there to comfort the inconsolable ones as best he could. It was he who had impressed upon them all the tremendous need of keeping the matter secret, so that Faith's fair name might remain unspotted by the mire of gossip, in case the worst should not happen. The God, to whom they all prayed, might yet intercede in her behalf and—through Mark—perform a miracle. It was he who then left them and went alone to his empty store, to sit in darkness, material and spiritual, waiting, waiting, waiting, on the slim

chance that a miracle might be performed, and Mark think of the telephone. Hour after hour he sat thus, being made over and born anew through the spirit of sacrifice, suffering the agonies of deliverance. Then, at midnight, the telephone bell had rung loudly, and a strange messenger had given him a strange message, but one laden with great joy. And it was he who had driven John Gray and Sister Patience, Friend Daniel Goodbody, David, Hope, and Jeremiah to the county seat at the break of day, and told the judge what had occurred—and was to occur.

“It is passing strange, is it not—their absence, especially that of Friend Mark Gray?” whispered one of the waiting spectators.

“Nay, I think it not strange at all,” answered another, who had never liked the youth. “Friend Daniel should never have set him free on parole. Doubtless he, fearing a verdict of ‘guilty,’ hath jumped his bail and fled. That would also account for the absence of the others who know the fact, and . . .”

He was interrupted by the sound of a motor car drawing up before the open door of the little Court House. The curious waiters within craned their necks, and caught sight of Robert Means, the accuser, at the wheel, and that other stranger—the man of violence and a profane tongue—seated beside him. Excitement blossomed forth afresh.



Word of the long anticipated arrival of the man who had charged their neighbor with a deadly crime was tossed in loud whispers from lip to lip.

A man in ordinary clothes, but distinguished as a deputy-sheriff by the shining badge of authority which he wore upon his vest—it was warm and he was coatless—hurried out, spoke to the wrestler, or rather was spoken to by him, and returned to move down the center aisle at almost a jog-trot. He disappeared within the portal marked, "PRIVATE." Again there was a general turning of heads and peering towards the main door.

And then the dwellers in Content were treated to the greatest sensation in all their placid lives!

Up the three steps and through the crowded courtroom walked Robert Vandervetter Means; but he did not come alone, nor walk as one strong in the righteousness of his cause, an injured party, a defender of law and order. Nor was he accompanied by his counsel. That worthy gentleman had lost the early train and was at that moment pacing the station platform in Philadelphia, glancing at his watch every two minutes and fretting and fuming deliciously. Nay, the accuser might himself have well been the criminal. His apparel was dusty and awry—entirely lacking in the perfect set and immaculate appearance which had often been laughed at, and secretly envied by the youths of the Quaker village. His aristocratic countenance was smutched with dirt, dark with the shadow of a



coming beard, discolored with bruises, and the seat of a sullen, furtive expression.

But that was only the beginning—the cause of the first and least of several audible gasps of amazement on the part of the onlookers.

Close beside him, with his immense fingers gripping Means' coat-sleeve in a policeman's hold, walked the Bull—a queerly shaped giant whose cannon-ball head seemed to rest in the hollow between his bulging shoulders, and whose ugly features wore an expression of intense ferocity. A few of them had seen him before, and now started to recount the episode in which he and Friend Mark Gray had figured earlier in the month, only to have their whisperings abruptly broken off by a third, and still more audible gasp.

For, a few steps behind this ill-assorted pair, came Mark Gray himself, likewise dusty and disheveled, very stern and pale, and with an ugly cut, barely closed, across his right cheek from nose to ear. His arm was supportingly about the waist of a woman, bare-headed and very pale, who nevertheless walked bravely forward, with eyes unswerving and lips tightly compressed.

And that girl was Sister Faith Franklyn!

The door through which the officer had passed now opened again. He appeared, beckoning, and the four new arrivals passed out of sight within the portal which was closed behind them, but not before those nearest it had caught a fleeting glimpse

of the group within the room, and seen David and little Hope run forward to fling themselves, weeping, into Faith's loving arms.

Then how tongues flew; what a multitude of questions were asked to pass unanswered; what a host of surmises were put forth and seized upon as reasonable explanations or rejected as absurdities! The buzz of many voices, subdued, yet thrilling with excitement, continued as the moments passed. A sudden hush fell as the door reopened. One might have heard a pin fall, but instead heard the heavy, pompous tread of the justice, whose boots squeaked, as he came out of the room marked "PRIVATE," and mounted to his bench. The deputy-sheriff, who was also the clerk, first preceded and then followed him, calling out loudly, "Everybody stand up. Take off your hat, you!" This to a Quaker late-comer, who had just arrived, breathless.

"Sit down!"

The spectators resumed their places and began their whispering again, to cease abruptly as the presiding justice raised his gavel and brought it down on the desk with an authoritative bang. For the moment he was the central figure in a situation full of dramatic possibilities, and the fact was not displeasing to him. Judges, too, are human. The officer uttered the formal "Oyez," and then turned clerk again to announce, loudly, "First case on the docket, State vs. Mark Gray."

He stepped down from his lowly platform and, opening the door to the anteroom, beckoned. There was a rustle and a sound like a deep sigh throughout the court-room. The Bull strode forth, still clutching Robert Means by the sleeve. Mark followed, closing the door behind him.

"Your Honor," announced Durham, "This guy has somethin' tuh say. Say it!" he commanded in a resounding whisper to Means.

The accuser hesitated, swallowing hard.

"Say it!"

"I . . . Your Honor . . . I . . . I made a mistake. The . . ."

"Mistake, nothin'. Come through, *clean*. Git me?" His fingers shifted their grip to the man's arm, and he uttered an involuntary cry. The perspiration started from his pale forehead.

"I . . . I desire to retract my charge against . . . against Gray," whispered Means, hoarsely.

"Why? Tell the judge why, you . . . tell 'em all why!"

"It . . . it was false."

"Right! But how false? Tell 'em. You know!"

"As false as . . . as hell!"

"Right!" As he spoke the word, the wrestler swung his captive sharply about so that he faced the dwellers of Content who filled the court room. The babel of excited voices burst forth again, punctuated but not checked by the banging of the

judge's gavel. A broad grin spread over the face of Mr. Durham. He had scored, scored heavily, in a new rôle. The countenance of the presiding justice was set in angry lines, but a close observer might have caught a contradictory twinkle in his eyes. The majesty of the law was being outraged—but he was human, and enjoying the situation immensely. The deputy-sheriff, however, was younger and less tolerant. He shouted, "Silence! Silence, or I'll clear the court room."

The threat had the desired effect. Nobody wanted to be deprived of what might follow. The tumult subsided almost at once.

"Case dismissed. Prisoner discharged," announced the judge, and then addressed Mark with the words, "Do you wish to make a complaint against this man Means, Mr. Gray?"

Mark started and grew red and white by turns. "Friend . . . Sir . . . *Your honor*—" finally prompted thereto by the Bull's stage whisper—"I do not think that I understand thee."

"I mean, do you wish to prefer charges against him for false arrest?"

"Nay, I thank thee. I am well content to let him go."

Means lifted his head with a jerk, and a look of immense relief passed over his drawn face. One of physical agony followed it, as the wrestler tightened the clutch on his arm, saying, in a voice which



poured forth from the vials of righteous wrath, "Say thank you, yuh damned bla'guard. Say thank you to a Christian gentleman, who's lettin' you off with nothin' but a first-class scare. Personally, it makes me pretty near sick, and I'm tellin' yuh this. If I ever run intuh yuh again, I'm likely tuh go tuh the electric chair fer what I do tuh yuh. Now, *git out!*"

Six strides, and he had dragged Means to the open door and sent him headlong down the steps with a shove so powerful that he went as though shot from a catapult. The excitement within the room—temporarily checked—burst out again, unaffected by the pounding of the judge's gavel and the deputy-sheriff's shouts of "Order! Order!"

Mr. Durham turned and strode back to the bench. Above all the clamor his great voice boomed out, "I beg Your Honor's pardon. But it jest had tuh be did."

A violent attack of coughing on the part of the justice alike prevented him from declaring that the man was in contempt of court—as was quite obviously the case—and covered his exit with Mark through the door marked "PRIVATE."

Quieter at last, but with their curiosity at fever pitch, the other dwellers in Content waited for the epilogue of the drama. But they waited in vain. The curtain was not lifted again—that is to say, the

door was not reopened—for the gathering within the anteroom had made a hasty departure by a side exit, and all, crowded into Friend Dyer Dexter's carry-all, were well on the homeward road long before the first of their disappointed neighbors was moved to leave the court room.

They had not gone, however, before the final act had really taken place within that sanctum sanctorum.

When Mark had entered, Faith had gone directly to him without thought of the many witnesses about. She had laid both her hands upon his shoulders and spoken in a low, sweet voice. "Mark Gray, thou art free. Thou hast conquered."

"Yea." Suddenly he bent his head and clasped his hands, while the old look of dejection took possession of his countenance.

"Is that all that thou hast to say to me, now?"

"Oh, what else can I say, Faith Franklyn?"

"Thou canst now honorably ask me to . . . to be thy wife." Barely whispered.

"Nay, that I cannot do, honorably. The heritage of my blood . . ."

"Hath enabled thee to save me, thrice, Mark Gray. Thank God for it."

"Perhaps. I do not know. But what is past, is past. Now I am thinking of the future . . . mine own and . . . and the generations of my blood. My heritage of passion might become in part the heritage of my children. How can I ever hope to

marry, knowing that, and not knowing whether or not the curse of blood would ever be removed, or when it might burst forth again? Nay, it would not be fair to thee, though I need not tell thee that I love thee—alike as a Friend, and as the man of impulse which is the real me. And that I always shall love thee.”

“Thou hast already proved that a seeming curse may be of verity a blessing, Mark Gray. There is one thing stronger than the inheritance of the blood.”

“What?”

“Love, Mark Gray. Especially the love of God, who directeth the wills of men, if they wilt but seek his ready guidance.”

He groaned and covered his face with his hands. Faith let her arms drop to her sides, as though in defeat.

“I understand, Mark,” she said, gently. “Thou art thinking of me, not of thyself—as always. But two, who are in perfect accord, can fight better than one. Together . . .”

“Nay,” he interrupted.

“Thou art, then, firmly determined not to ask me to marry thee?”

He did not answer. He could not.

“I am sorry.”

Mark turned, dropped into a convenient chair, and buried his head upon his mighty arms. The smith would have stepped to his side. Although the

others had heard only part of the low-spoken words, all of them realized their import. But Faith anticipated his action. She took her place, almost challengingly, close to Mark, half facing them, and her voice rang clearly out, "I am a woman, and a Friend, but this—if ever—is the time for plain speaking. Thou hast said that thou lovest me, Mark Gray. I love thee, and if thou wilt not ask me to marry thee—because of the reasons which thou hast given—I will marry thee without thine asking. And I think that thou canst not well refuse to accept me, after what hath happened."

Mark raised his head. A great light was illuminating his bruised and weary countenance. "The love of a true woman is like the love of God, and each is as a driven well whose pure waters can both cleanse and quench the thirst. . . . The more we draw upon it the more it will flow forth, an inexhaustible stream." Again the words came to his mind. And how he thirsted! With a sound like a great sob Mark stretched out his arms and drew Faith to him.

"The love of God, that passeth understanding, be with them now—and evermore," said John Gray, solemnly.

"*Amen.*" Friend Dyer Dexter, Daniel Goodbody and Sister Patience made the response together, and the word was echoed in yet another voice—deep and strangely husky.

Jeremiah's eyes, which had almost constantly



been fixed on the wrestler with an expression close to adoration, now opened wider. "The Bull!" he whispered. "Gosh. The Bull said that! Well, I'll be *danged*."

THE END



# MARK GRAY'S HERITAGE

A Romance

*By Eliot Harlow Robinson*

*Author of "Smiles: A Rose of the Cumberlands,"  
"Smiling Pass," "The Maid of Mirabelle," etc.*

*Cloth, 12mo, illustrated, \$1.90*

*"What is bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh."*

MR. ROBINSON'S distinguished success came with the acclaim accredited to his novel, SMILES, "*The Best-Loved Book of the Year*," and its sequel, SMILING PASS. With delicate humor and a sincere faith in the beautiful side of human nature, Mr. Robinson has created for himself a host of enthusiastic admirers. In his new book he chooses a theme, suggested perhaps by the old proverb quoted above ("Pilpay's Fables"). His setting is a Quaker village, his theme the conflict between grave Quaker ideals and the strength and hot blood of impulsive Mark Gray.

Here is a book that is worthy of the reception accorded SMILES by all readers who appreciate a story of deep significance, simply yet powerfully built upon fundamental passions, wrought with a philosophy that always sees the best in troubled times.

The enthusiastic editor who passed on MARK GRAY'S HERITAGE calls it—hardly too emphatically—"A mighty good story with plenty of entertainment for those who like action (there is more of that in it than in any other of Mr. Robinson's novels). The reading public will unquestionably call it another 'courage book'—which they called the SMILES books, you know. The language is both strong and smooth. The story has a punch!"

# POLLY THE PAGAN

Her Lost Love Letters

*By Isabel Anderson*

*With an appreciative Foreword by Basil King*

*Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, \$1.90*

ISABEL ANDERSON, who heretofore has confined her literary talents to writing of presidents and diplomats and fascinating foreign lands, contributes to our list her first novel, POLLY THE PAGAN, a story of European life and "high society." The story is unfolded in the lively letters of a gay and vivacious American girl traveling in Europe, and tells of the men whom she meets in Paris, in London or Rome, her flirtations (and they are many and varied!) and exciting experiences. Among the letters written to her are slangy ones from an American college boy and some in broken English from a fascinated Russian Prince (or was he disillusioned, when after dining at a smart Parisian café with the adorable Polly he was trapped by secret police?); but the chief interest, so far as Polly's *affaires d'amour* are concerned, centers around the letters from a young American, in the diplomatic service in Rome, who is in a position to give intimate descriptions of smart life and Italian society.

The character drawing is clever, and the suspense as to whom the fascinating Polly will marry, if indeed the mysterious young lady will marry anybody, is admirably sustained.



# UNCLE MARY

A Novel for Young or Old



*By Isla May Mullins*



*Author of "The Blossom Shop" books, "Tweedie," etc.*

*Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, \$1.75*

SINCE the great success of POLLYANNA there have been many efforts to achieve the "GLAD BOOK" style of fiction, but none so successful as Mrs. Mullins' Trade Mark UNCLE MARY.

Here is a story, charming in its New England village setting, endearing in its characters, engrossing in its plot, and diverting in its style. The PAGE imprint has been given to many books about beautiful characters in fiction, — Pollyanna, Anne Shirley, Rose Webb of "SMILES," and Lloyd Sherman of the "LITTLE COLONEL" books. To this galaxy we now add "Uncle" Mary's protégé, Libbie Lee.

Mrs. Mullins is an author gifted with the ability to appeal to the young in heart of whatever age. Her characters are visually portrayed. Her situations have the interest of naturalness and suspense. The reader of UNCLE MARY will become in spirit an inhabitant of Sunfield; will understand the enjoyment of the sudden acquisition of wealth, a limousine, and — an adopted child (!), by the sisters, "Uncle" Mary and "Aunt" Alice; will watch with interest the thawing and rejuvenation of "Uncle" Mary, the cure of Alice, and the solving of the mystery of the wealth of sweet little Libbie Lee.

# THE RED CAVALIER

Or, The Twin Turrets Mystery

*By Gladys Edson Locke*

*Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, \$1.90*

HERE is a mystery story that is different! The subtlety and strangeness of India — poison and daggers, the impassive faces and fierce hearts of Prince Bardai and his priestly adviser; a typical English week-end house party in the mystery-haunted castle, Twin Turrets, in Yorkshire; a vivid and contrasting background.

And the plot! Who is the mysterious Red Cavalier? Is he the ghost of the ancestral portrait, that hangs in Sir Robert Grainger's strange library? Is he flesh and blood, and responsible for the marauding thefts in the neighborhood? Is he responsible for Prince Kassim's murder? Or is it only coincidence that one of the guests at the masked ball happened to wear the costume of the Red Cavalier?

Miss Locke has been able to weave a weird and absorbing tale of modern detective romance, the strangeness of India in modern England.

There is Lady Berenice Coningsby, a bit *déclassé*; Ethelyn Roydon, more so; Princess Lona Bardai, "Little Lotus-Blossom," sweet and pathetic; Mrs. Dalrymple, the woman of mystery; Miss Vandelia Egerton, the spinster owner of Twin Turrets. There is dashing Max Egerton and the impeccable Lord Borrowdean; Captain Grenville Coningsby; Prince Kassim Bardai, with the impenetrable eyes, and Chand Talsdad, his venerable adviser. Which of them is the Red Cavalier?

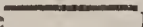
# Selections from The Page Company's List of Fiction

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Trade Mark

Trade  Mark

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Mr. Leigh Mitchell Hodges, *The Optimist*, in an editorial for the *Philadelphia North American*, says: "And when, after Pollyanna has gone away, you get her letter saying she is going to take 'eight steps' tomorrow — well, I don't know just what you may do, but I know of one person who buried his face in his hands and shook with the gladdest sort of sadness and got down on his knees and thanked the Giver of all gladness for Pollyanna."

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While preparing "Pollyanna" for the screen, Miss Pickford said enthusiastically that it was the best picture she had ever made in her life, and the success of the picture on the screen has amply justified her statement. Mary Pickford's interpretation of the beloved little heroine as shown in the illustrations, adds immeasurably to the intrinsic charm of this popular story.

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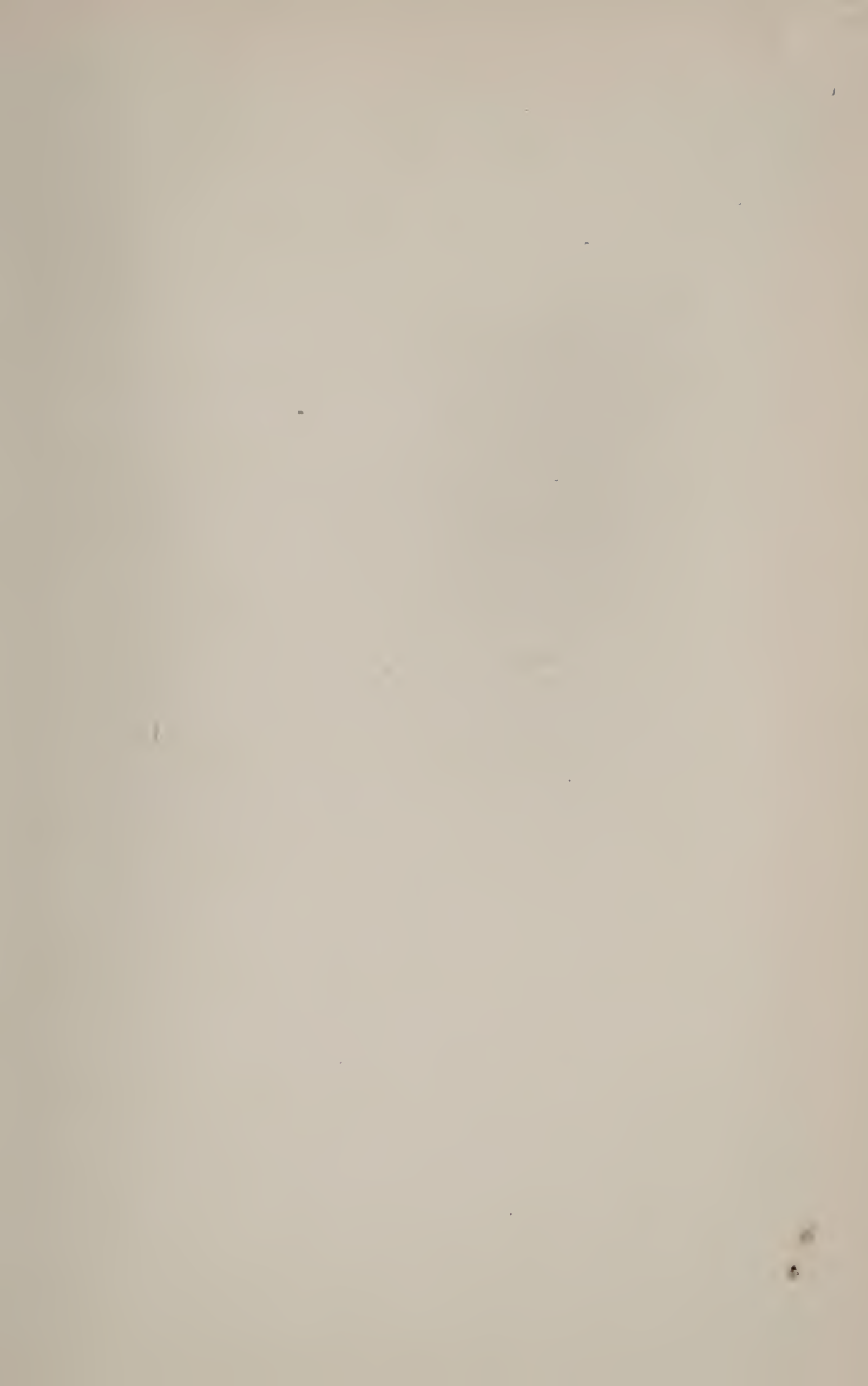
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